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# AmeriCorps



## Program Directors Guide

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## Key Distinctions, Definitions, and Acronyms

**AmeriCorps** – An umbrella term that refers to programs that are designated by the Corporation as National Service programs and the participants serving in them. AmeriCorps includes AmeriCorps State & National, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps).

**AmeriCorps Members** – An individual selected to serve and enrolled into an approved service position should be referred to as AmeriCorps members or National Service Participants, not *volunteers, workers, staff, participants, or employees*. The word *member* is lowercase.

**AmeriCorps National Service Network** – Refers to all of the programs affiliated with AmeriCorps—including AmeriCorps\*NCCC, AmeriCorps\*VISTA, AmeriCorps\*State and National, AmeriCorps\*Tribes and Territories, the AmeriCorps Education Awards Program (EAP).

**AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps)** – A residential AmeriCorps program in which 18-24-year-old-members are housed and trained together on military bases and deployed in teams to service sites throughout the surrounding region. <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps/ameriCorps-nccc>

**AmeriCorps State & National** – Used when referring to grants or funding, AmeriCorps State grants are distributed through the state commissions; AmeriCorps National grants are distributed to organizations directly from the national office of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

**AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America)** – Full-time, National Service program for citizens ages 18 and older interested in developing sustainable solutions to poverty in communities across America. AmeriCorps VISTA members serve with nonprofit, faith-based, and community organizations and agencies to increase capacity, develop infrastructure that aids and expands services, strengthens programs, and empowers low income individuals. AmeriCorps VISTA is under the AmeriCorps umbrella and is administered from the Corporation's State Offices.

**Audit** – An official inspection of an individual's or organization's accounts, typically by an independent body. An audit is not the same as compliance monitoring.

**Campus Compact** – A national organization of college and university presidents with numerous state affiliates committed to advancing service on their campuses. <http://compact.org/>

**Citizen** – A legally recognized subject or national of a state or commonwealth, either native or naturalized. A person who owes allegiance to and is entitled to the enjoyment of full rights in the United States.

**Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)** – 45 CFR 2520 govern AmeriCorps use the link to search & locate important information! [https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title45/45cfr2522\\_main\\_02.tpl](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title45/45cfr2522_main_02.tpl)

**Community Based Organization (CBO)** – Any private non-profit organization (including faith based organizations) that is representative of a community or a significant segment of a community and is engaged in meeting, human, environmental, or public safety needs.

**Commission Investment Funds (CIF)** – Funds provided to state commissions to facilitate increased Commission capacity and the ability to provide training and technical assistance to their programs. Funds may vary from year to year as per Congressional appropriations.

**Consortia** – A group of organizations whose purpose is to collectively facilitate and support the work of a service program in ways that add material and human resources beyond those available to each organization individually.

**Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)** – The independent federal agency that encompasses the work and staff of two previously existing agencies, the Commission on National and Community Service and ACTION. The Corporation was created by the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993.

**Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973** – The Domestic Volunteer Service Act authorized VISTA, the Foster Grandparent Program, the Senior Companion Program, and the RSVP program. The legislation was amended in the early 1990's with the National and Community Service Trust Act which created the Corporation for National and Community Service, AmeriCorps and State Service Commissions.

**Education Award** – A post-service benefit earned by all AmeriCorps successfully completing a Term of Service. The Ed Award is a voucher that the Alum can apply directly toward cost of attendance at a qualified educational institution graduate school, or approved vocational training and may be used to pay off federally backed education loans. <https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/alumni/segal-ameri-corps-education-award>

**Education Award Program (EAP)** – An AmeriCorps program that receives a small administrative grant, member positions and Education Awards and uses nonfederal resources to pay the members' living allowance and support program costs.

**Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009** – On April 21, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act ([read more](#)). The Serve America Act reauthorizes and expands National Service programs administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) by amending the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973.

**eGrants** – CNCS's online grant management system <https://egrants.cns.gov/espan/main/login.jsp>

**Employers of National Service** – A special initiative of CNCS designed to connect AmeriCorps and Peace Corps alumni with employers from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. Through this initiative, employers have increased access to a dedicated, highly qualified, and mission-oriented pool of potential employees, and National Service alumni have additional opportunities to apply their skills in the workplace. <http://www.nationalservice.gov/special-initiatives/employers-national-service>

**Evaluation** – Evaluation is the use of social science research methods to assess a program's design, implementation, and effectiveness. <http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation>

**Fiscal Year** – A period of 12 months during which a particular budget is to be expended and accounted for. The Federal Fiscal Year begins on October 1 and ends September 30. The Montana State Fiscal Year begins July 1 and ends June 30.

**Formula Funding** – The annual allocation awarded to each State Commissions annually by CNCS. The formula allocation to each state accounts for the states populous. The Commission then solicits proposals for AmeriCorps formula funded programs or when feasible, planning grants.

**Foster Grandparent Program (FGP)** – One of the three National Senior Service Corps programs. Foster Grandparents devote their service to children with special or exceptional needs, and typically serve in schools.

**Grantee** – The direct recipient of a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). In the AmeriCorps State model the **Prime Grantee** is the state commission. AmeriCorps funds are granted directly to the state commission and are then subgranted to organizations that then operate AmeriCorps programs. The prime grantee is ultimately responsible for ensuring that AmeriCorps funds are used appropriately.

**In-kind** – Contributions and donations made in goods and services, not cash.

**Learn and Serve America** – Learn and Serve America was a United States government program under the authority of the Corporation for National and Community Service. Its mission was to provide opportunities for students nationwide to participate in service learning projects, and to gain valuable experience while serving communities. In 2011 the United States House Appropriations Committee eliminated the entire budget for Learn and Serve America. As a result, CNCS's Learn & Serve America program, which annually funded service-learning for more than 1 million students in k-12 schools, community based organizations and higher education institutions for 21 years was eliminated.

**Living Allowance** – AmeriCorps members may receive a living allowance during the Term of Service. This is a benefit distributed incrementally to the participant, based on the term of service. In addition to the Education Award available to members who successfully complete their term of service (*see stipend.*) AmeriCorps members earn a **Living Allowance** - not a salary or wage.

**Matching Funds** – State commissions themselves, and the programs they fund, are required to meet certain specified match requirements as a condition for receipt of federal funding. For every dollar of federal funds, there is a designated percentage of case of nonfederal funds that the state commission or other organizations must provide, this is the 'match'.

**Members** – Participants in AmeriCorps (including AmeriCorps NCCC, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps State & National programs). AmeriCorps members **serve** with the AmeriCorps program, *they do not work for AmeriCorps or the program and they are not employees*. National Service Participants are to be referred to as members – not volunteers or workers. *Montana Code Annotated (MCA) 39-51-204.* <http://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/39/51/39-51-204.htm>

**Mission Statement** – A mission statement expresses an organization's or program's vision with regard to National Service and indicates the ultimate impacts to be achieved. A program's annual objectives are typically closely connected to the mission statement, service activities and performance measures.

**National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993** – The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 created AmeriCorps and the Corporation for National Service. The act authorized appropriations for AmeriCorps State & National, AmeriCorps NCCC, Learn & Serve America, the National Service Trust, and the Points of Light Foundation. The 1993 legislation amended the National and Community Service Act of 1990.

**National Competitive Funding** – An annual pool of funds against which state commissions may compete to fund AmeriCorps programs in their states. Funds available are subject to Congressional appropriations.

**National Days of Service** – A project undertaken by a large group of participants often from many different programs and usually in conjunction with a special day to highlight service programs and their participants, such as Martin Luther King Day and Global Youth Service Day.

**National Directs (AmeriCorps National)** – AmeriCorps programs funded directly by the Corporation through multi-state non-profit organizations that deploy members into more than one state.

**National Senior Service Corps (NSSC)** – The umbrella term that encompasses the three senior service programs: Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

**National Service** – Results-oriented service by an individual or group of individuals that help meet the nation's needs in the areas of education, public safety, the environment, and other human needs.

**National Service and Community Service** – Refers to the programs affiliated with the Corporation for National and Community Service.

**NOFA- Notice of Funds Available** – A legal notification, published in the Federal Register, describing the intention of funding that is approved by Congress and actually available.

**NOFO – Notice of Funding Opportunity** – A legal notification, published in the Federal Register, describing indicates the intention of funding that is subject to Congressional appropriations.

**NCCC** – Common term used to refer to AmeriCorps\*NCCC.

**Outside Employment** – A term used to describe when an AmeriCorps member established employee employment status with an entity other than the service location.

**Participant** – Term used to describe any individual enrolled in a program funded by the Corporation; the more specific term “member,” refers to individuals enrolled in an AmeriCorps program.

**Presidents’ Summit for America’s Future** – This April 1997 historic gathering in Philadelphia where former Presidents Clinton, Bush, Carter, and Ford, and Secretary of State Colin Powell called for all Americans to find ways to ensure that all children have access to the fundamental resources they need:

- Caring adults in their lives, as parents, mentors, tutors, and coaches;
- Safe places with structured activities in which to learn and grow;
- A healthy start and healthy future;
- An effective education that equips them with marketable skills; and
- An opportunity to give back through their communities through their own service.

**Program** – A coordinated group of activities linked by common elements such as recruitment, selection, and training of participants, and staff, regular group activities, and assignment to projects organized for the purpose of achieving the mission and goals of meeting needs with National Service, and carried out with the assistance provided under the Act.

**Project** – An activity, or set of activities, carried out through a program that receives assistance under the Act, that results in a specific service or improvement that otherwise would not be done with existing funds, and that does not duplicate the services or functions of the organization where participants are assigned.

**Partnership** – Two or more entities that have entered into a written agreement specifying the goals and activities of the relationship as well as the responsibilities, goals, and activities of each partner.

**Peace Corps** – The Peace Corps is a service opportunity for motivated citizens to immerse themselves in a community abroad, working side by side with local leaders to tackle the most pressing challenges of our generation. <https://www.peacecorps.gov/>

**PSA** – Term used to refer to a Public Service Announcement.

**Request for Proposals (RFP)** – A term which some states or organizations use to describe the document which they solicit proposals from other organizations. Others may call such as document a grant application or bid. State commissions will use RFP’s for AmeriCorps programs from non-profit organizations, local governments, higher education institution, Indian Tribes, and state agencies.

**Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)** - One of the three National Senior Service Corps programs created 1972. <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/senior-corps/rsvp>

**Returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV)** – A term commonly used when referring to a Peace Corps Alumni.

**SEA** – State Education Agency, in Montana this is the Office of Public Instruction (OPI). <http://opi.mt.gov/>

**Senior Companion Program (SCP)** – One of three National Senior Service Corps programs. Senior Companions help other seniors live independently in their own homes and receive a stipend. <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/senior-corps/senior-corps-programs/senior-companions>

**Service-Learning** – A method by which students improve academic learning and develop personal skills through structured service projects that meet community needs. Service-learning builds upon students' service activities by providing them with opportunities to learn by preparing, leading, and reflecting on the service experience.

**Service Location** – Also referred to as **Host Site** is the primary location where the AmeriCorps member contributes the majority of their service. The site is typically an eligible organization that has been selected to provide a placement for a participant or participants, either as a primary service location or a short term project. The qualifications and responsibilities of the service site vary between programs but often include oversight to ensure member activities are allowable, and the tracking of member hours. *Upon enrollment, each member must be assigned to an active primary service location in eGrants within 30 days.*

**Service Recipient** – A community person or group who benefit from the service of AmeriCorps members, also referred to as beneficiaries.

**State Commission** – A 15-25 member, independent, bipartisan body appointed by a Governor to implement service programs. Duties of a State Commission include development of a Unified State Plan for service and volunteering in the state; submission of the state's application to CNCS for AmeriCorps; administration of the competition for AmeriCorps State programs; oversight and monitoring of funded AmeriCorps, and reporting to the Corporation. <http://serve.mt.gov/commission/>

**State Service Plan (SSP)** – A three-year plan developed by each state commission in partnership with the Corporation State Office, the State Education Agency, and other organizations in the state. The State Service Plan describes the vision, goals and objectives for promoting National Service and volunteering and for building a solid portfolio of high quality programs and support services in the state. <http://serve.mt.gov/mtstate-service-plan/>

**Stipend** – An end of service cash benefit that is an alternative to the Education Award – an option only for AmeriCorps\*VISTA members. The term is not synonymous with living allowance. (*See living allowance.*)

**Streams of Service** – A term to refer to the many types of service programs, for example, the AmeriCorps State and VISTA streams of service. This includes the major National Service programs under CNCS, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps (Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and RSVP). When there are joint activities the term 'cross stream' is commonly used.

**Student Ownership** – The notion that students can make important contributions to their schools and communities.

**Subgrantee/Subrecipient**- The eligible organization that is granted CNCS resources from OCS. An entity responsible for recruiting, selecting and training members, providing benefits and support services, engaging regular group activities and service assignments. The program is responsible for oversight of the AmeriCorps program and the appropriate management of federal funds, but may or may not necessarily oversee the day to day activities of AmeriCorps members, as determined by program design.

**VISTA** – See AmeriCorps\*VISTA.

**Youth Civic Engagement** – The process of engaging youth in affecting policy and taking action on issues in their communities.

**Youth Led Service** – The involvement of young people leading and providing service to their schools and/or communities. This term should not be confused with 'youth services', which typically refers to programs where youth are the recipients of service.

\*Remember to check the Mandatory Supplemental Guidance, aka the Glossary, associated with the Notice of Funding Opportunity that the program was funded, for more terms and definitions. See AmeriCorps grants on [serve.mt.gov](http://serve.mt.gov) and then locate the correct year, funding type and documents.\*

# Chapter One

## *Introduction, History & Structure*

### **Introduction**

This manual is periodically updated. This guide does not supersede requirements established by the Terms and Conditions of an AmeriCorps grant or contract, or requirements applicable to federal grants, such as the 2 CFR200 OmniCircular. The information contained in this resource manual does not include all the legal requirements of an AmeriCorps grant, nor does it constitute CNCS' official definitive interpretation of the law, regulations, and policies related to AmeriCorps. It sets ServeMontana's policy and procedures, and serves as a resource guide for program staff to maintain sound operations in compliance with federal and state statutes, regulations, provisions, and policies.

Managing AmeriCorps grants: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/managing-ameri-corps-grants>

### **A Brief History of National Service**

The United States has always relied on the dedication and action of citizens. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) advances the longstanding tradition of civic engagement by providing opportunities for Americans to improve their communities through service.

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/who-we-are/our-history/national-service-timeline>

### **The Civilian Conservation Corps**

During the 1930s Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps. In response to his call to service, 4 million young people joined, restoring the nation's parks, revitalizing the economy, and supporting their families. For 11 years the Civilian Conservation Corps provided billions of dollars in service and allowed millions of families to live in dignity.

### **The GI Bill- the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944**

During the 1940's, the GI Bill linked wartime service to educational benefits, offering returning World War II veterans the opportunity to pursue higher education in partial compensation for service to their country. Veterans improved their lives by attending college and contributed mightily to America's future. With the education they received, those citizens helped spark the economic boom that helped make America the world's leading economy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***Peace Corps***

In 1961 President John F. Kennedy issued a call to service by challenging Americans in his inaugural address to "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." As a result, the Peace Corps began. Peace Corps engages 6-7 thousand people into international Service to meet the needs of people and places. After service, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCV) put their knowledge from their service experience to work at home, in the spirit of citizenship, changing America for the better.



### ***The War on Poverty***

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson brought the spirit of the Peace Corps home to America by creating Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). VISTA, now part of AmeriCorps, funds programs under the sponsorship of local public agencies or nonprofit organizations to improve the condition of people living in under-served, low-income communities throughout American States and Indian Nations. Other initiatives such as the Retired and Senior Volunteer Corps (RSVP), the Foster Grandparent Program, and the Senior Companion Program were developed to engage older Americans in the work of improving the nation.

### ***Revival of Interest in National and Community Service***

In 1989, President George H. W. Bush sparked a revival of interest in National Service when he instituted the White House Office of National Service. In 1990 Congress passed the National and Community Service Act, which created a Commission on National and Community Service whose mission was to “renew the ethic of civic responsibility in the United States.” Full implementation began in 1992, when the Commission awarded \$64 million in grants to support four broad types of state and local community service efforts.

These initiatives were the Learn and Serve programs that involved school-aged youth in community service and service-learning through a variety of school and community-based activities; Higher Education Innovative Projects aimed at involving college students in community service and at promoting community service at educational institutions; American Conservation and Youth Service Corps, supporting summer and year-round youth corps initiatives that engage both in- and out-of-school youth in community service work; and the National and Community Service Demonstration Models, for programs that were potential models for large-scale National Service. The National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC), a demonstration program to help solve problems here at home, was enacted later as part of the 1993 Defense Authorization Act. It is a residential service program modeled on the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps and the United States military.

### ***National and Community Service Trust Act***

President Bill Clinton signed the National and Community Service Trust Act into law on September 21, 1993. The legislation created a new federal agency, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), to administer federally-funded National Service programs. The law created AmeriCorps, which was designed to support local, state, and national organizations across the nation, by engaging Americans in results-driven service. CNCS took over management of the programs of two previous agencies, ACTION, which was responsible for running VISTA and the National Senior Service Corps programs, and the more recent Commission on National and Community Service, including the NCCC, forming the network of National Service programs that we see today.

### ***Service in the New Millennium***

President George W. Bush called on all Americans to serve their country for two years and announced the creation of the USA Freedom Corps, an umbrella network for volunteerism. A coordinating council housed at the White House and chaired by the President worked to expand and strengthen federal service programs like Peace Corps, Citizen Corps, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps, and to raise awareness of and break down barriers to service opportunities within all federal government agencies.

### ***The Serve America Act***

On April 21, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. The Serve America Act reauthorized and expanded National Service programs administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service by amending the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973.

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/legislation/edward-m-kennedy-serve-america-act>

## **Organizational Structure**

**Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)**, Created in 1993, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) supports National Service at the national, state and local levels, overseeing three main initiatives:

- AmeriCorps – members serve with local and national organizations to meet community needs and upon successful completion, receive Education Awards (AmeriCorps State & National, VISTA and NCCC)
- Learn and Serve – defunded in 2011, provided support to schools, higher education institutions and community-based organizations, to engage students, teachers, and others in service-learning; and
- Senior Corps, Americans 55 and older contribute their skills and experience to their peers, elementary school students and the community (RSVP, Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions)

AmeriCorps operates in a decentralized manner that gives significant administrative responsibility to states and nonprofits. This table suggests some of the support that CNCS can provide:

<b>CNCS Office</b>	<b>AmeriCorps Support Functions</b>
<b>Program Office</b>	Oversees programmatic aspects of grants and awards. Program Officers serve as primary liaisons with state Service Commissions & National Program grantees.
<b>Grants Office</b>	Oversees financial aspects of grants and awards.
<b>National Service Trust</b>	Manages the Education Awards for AmeriCorps members.
<b>Public Affairs</b>	Oversees media relations, marketing, and publications, including the online recruitment website. Provides marketing and branding information to the field.
<b>Public Liaison</b>	Oversees national initiatives, National Service days, and all AmeriCorps awards.
<b>General Counsel</b>	Provides legal counsel for CNCS and can answer legal questions related to AmeriCorps program management.
<b>Office of the Inspector General (OIG)</b>	Detects and deters waste, fraud, abuse, and violations of law of CNCS funded programs. <a href="http://www.cncsoig.gov/">http://www.cncsoig.gov/</a>

## **CNCS State Offices**

CNCS operates state offices in most states. State offices are part of CNCS's Office of Field Liaison. The state offices are responsible for administering AmeriCorps\*VISTA projects and the three Senior Corps programs. In Montana, the state office director serves as an ex-officio member of the State Service Commission. CNCS State Offices, <http://www.nationalservice.gov/stateoffices>

## **Montana Commission on Community Service**

State service commissions were created in the National and Community Service Trust Act as amended in 1993. State service commissions are the essential state partners of the federal agency, the Corporation for National and Community Service. State service commissions are governor-appointed public agencies or nonprofit organizations made up of more than 1,110 commissioners - citizens leading the nation's philanthropic and service movement. The nation's 52 state service commissions operate at the state and local level granting more than \$386 million from federal National Service funds while matching these federal dollars with millions from state and local sources to support citizen service and volunteerism in America. These funds support more than 80,000 AmeriCorps members nationwide. State service commissions administer AmeriCorps State and community volunteer programs to address critical community needs and engage citizens into service.

- <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact-us/state-service-commissions>

The Montana Commission is a diverse, non-partisan, Governor-appointed body representing a broad cross-section of service interests and statewide leadership in Montana. The Commission oversees the Governor's Office of Community Service (OCS). OCS is a state agency funded by CNCS and the State of Montana. OCS serves as an independent non-partisan commission which assumes responsibility for the distribution and expenditure of funds related to AmeriCorps State programs.

The Montana Office of Community Service strengthens civic engagement in the state by:

- Encouraging citizens of the state, regardless of age or income, to engage in National Service and community volunteerism.
- Calling young people to serve in projects that benefit communities, landscapes and people to improve their success through acquiring literacy, job skills, and interpersonal skills
- Building on the existing organizational framework of state and local governmental entities to expand full-time and part-time service opportunities in a wide variety of programs for all citizens, particularly youth and older Montanans.
- Involve participants in activities that would not otherwise be performed by employed workers.
- Establish programs to accomplish labor intensive improvements to public or low-income properties or to provide services for the benefit of the state, its communities, and its people through service contracts that specify the service to be performed.

## **State Education Agencies**

Learn and Serve America grew from Serve America, a program created under the National and Community Service Act of 1990. When CNCS was created in 1993, Serve America was reformed as Learn and Serve America. Learn and Serve America was again reauthorized in the 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. However, in 2011 the US House Appropriations Committee eliminated the entire budget for the Learn and Serve America program. Until 2011, the Montana Office of Public Instruction received and administered the school-based Learn and Serve funds.

**AmeriCorps Programs, Current AmeriCorps in Montana,** <http://serve.mt.gov/ameri-corps-in-montana/>

### *AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America)*

Members serve low-income communities and families across the country. VISTA members live in the communities where they serve, creating or expanding programs that can continue after they complete service. AmeriCorps VISTA members serve with local project sponsors and focus on building community capacity, mobilizing community resources and increasing self-reliance.

### *AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps)*

NCCC is a 10-month full-time residential program operated directly by the Corporation. AmeriCorps NCCC combines the best practices of civilian service with the best practices of military service, including leadership development and teambuilding. Members live and train at campuses located in Denver, CO, Perry Point, MD, Sacramento, CA, Vicksburg MS, and Vinton, IA. From those locations, teams are deployed into service to multiple states. AmeriCorps NCCC conducts service projects in partnership with local and state sponsors and has team focused on disaster response, called FEMA Corps.

### *AmeriCorps State and National*

#### AmeriCorps State

CNCS is reliant upon State Service Commissions to administer 78% (2016) of its AmeriCorps budget via grants to public and nonprofit organizations that sponsor service programs around the country, including hundreds of faith-based and community organizations, higher education institutions, and public agencies. Grants assist these groups in recruiting, training and placing AmeriCorps members to meet critical community needs.

**Additional Note:** AmeriCorps State programs based in any state or territory outside of Montana, discovered to be operating in Montana without consulting with ServeMontana prior to engaging in service may be asked to complete a consultation process similar to the National Direct consultation. If the AmeriCorps State program from another state or territory fails or refuses to check in with the Commission, ServeMontana may contact the State Service Commission that is responsible for that program to request information and communication regarding the service activities in Montana.

### AmeriCorps National Direct

AmeriCorps National Direct grantees leverage funds from CNCS directly to sponsor service programs, Indian Nations, and others to provide AmeriCorps service across two or more states, including faith-based and community organizations, higher education institutions, and public agencies. Grants assist these groups in recruiting, training and placing AmeriCorps members to meet critical community needs.

### **National Direct Consultation**

The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act requires that each applicant proposing a multi-state National Direct AmeriCorps program must consult with the State Service Commission in each of the states where they intend to operate the proposed multi-state program. CNCS clearly outlines this requirement in the Notice of Funding Opportunities. ***The Montana Commission expects all National Direct applicants, new, renew and continuation, to complete the Consultation requirements outlined in CNCS's AmeriCorps Notice of Funding Opportunity by using the information on the [serve.mt.gov](http://serve.mt.gov) website.***

The Montana Governor's Office of Community Service (OCS) appreciates the consultation process as a way to connect meaningful partnerships and to promote the use of National Service as an effective strategy to address unmet needs in communities throughout our state.

Through the National Direct consultation process, OCS aims to:

- Understand and be well versed in the scope and impacts of National Service programs operating in Montana.
- Connect national programs to geographic areas of the state with little or no National Service presence to meet needs identified in the Montana State Service Plan.
- Effectively use limited resources for cross-stream collaboration, member training, and other events that will lead to positive member experiences and increased public awareness of AmeriCorps National Service in Montana. National Directs placing members in Montana are expected to participate in the annual ServeMontana Symposium and to communicate with the Commission to share information on training, recognitions and other relevant activities.

ServeMontana uses the information provided through the National Direct Consultation process to provide input to CNCS on funding decisions that may impact our state, and to provide feedback/recommendations to the National Direct applicant. CNCS asks each Commission to provide input on each National Direct applicant whose grant proposes to place members in the state by selecting "support", "neutral", or "do not support", along with any comments associated with the opinion submitted.

# Chapter Two

## *AmeriCorps Grants*

This manual is intended to guide two streams of AmeriCorps State funding in Montana. The two funding types are formula funding, which is awarded at the state level, and competitive funding, which is awarded at the national level. Formula funding is based on a population driven formula and awarded directly to State Commissions to fund AmeriCorps programs. Competitive funding is also awarded to Commissions, with final funding determinations made by CNCS. The determination as to if an application is submitted at the competitive level or not, is given to the state commission and is primarily based on the strength of the application and organization. Whether it is a competitive or formula grant, awards are made for three year cycles with annual continuation applications. Each three year cycle is referred to as a renew. As a general rule, any program completing their second three year cycle under formula funding will be required to apply for competitive funds. As feasible, funds are available for planning grants which fund a one year period for an organization to develop a full AmeriCorps program.

In general the purpose of an AmeriCorps State grants is to “initiate, improve, or expand the ability of an organization and community to provide services to address local unmet environmental, educational, public safety (including disaster preparedness and response), or other human needs.” More specifically, AmeriCorps has a dual mission, to meet those identified ‘most pressing’ community needs and simultaneously develop contributors in the areas of leadership and citizenship.

### **Service Activities and Use of Grant Funds**

**Eligible Activities, 45 C.F.R. 2520,** [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/45CFR\\_chapterXXV.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/45CFR_chapterXXV.pdf)

The first key to determining the eligibility of a service activity is whether it falls within the Focus Areas identified by CNCS: Disaster Services, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, Economic Opportunity, and Veterans and Military Families. From there, it is the responsibility of the organization applying for an AmeriCorps grant to demonstrate that one or more of the priority areas are being met in a proposal, or in grant activities. Within each of the priority areas, AmeriCorps members provide *direct service* and/or *capacity building* activities that initiate, improve, or expand the capacity of an organization and community to meet the needs of those it serves.

*Direct service* activities refer generally to activities that provide a visible, measurable benefit to an individual, a group, or a community. Some examples are:

- Mentoring young adults in schools and communities.
- Engaging in community clean-up projects, trail maintenance and winterization.
- Providing information to vulnerable populations, and access to justice.
- Providing information and/or services to an area affected by disaster.

*Capacity building* activities increase an organizations ability to deliver their mission and are included in, or consistent with, the approved grant application. Examples of capacity building activities are:

- Strengthening volunteer management and recruitment.
- Conducting outreach and securing resources in support of service activities that meet specific needs in the community.
- Helping build the infrastructure of the sponsoring organization.
- Developing collaborative relationships with organizations working to achieve similar goals in the community, such as nonprofits, faith-based organizations, foundations, local government, institutions of higher education and local education agencies.

#### **Member Development Activities, CFR§2520.50**

No more than 20 percent of the aggregate of all AmeriCorps member service hours in the program, as reflected in the member enrollments in the National Service Trust, may be spent on education and training activities. Member development is typically orientation, AmeriCorps training, program and/or site specific training, ServeMontana Symposium attendance, end of service training events and other similar events as approved by programs, service site, or the Governor's Office of Community Service.

#### **Fundraising Activities, CFR§2520.40**

AmeriCorps members may raise resources directly in support of the program's service activities. An AmeriCorps member may spend no more than ten percent of the originally agreed-upon Term of Service, as reflected in the member enrollment in the National Service Trust, performing fundraising activities. Examples of fundraising activities AmeriCorps members may perform include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Seeking donations of books from companies and individuals for a program in which volunteers teach children to read;
- Writing a grant proposal to a foundation to secure resources to support the training of community volunteers;
- Securing supplies and equipment from the community to enable volunteers to help build houses for low-income individuals;
- Securing financial resources from the community to assist in launching or expanding a program that provides social services to the members of the community and is delivered, in whole or in part, through the members of a community-based organization;
- Seeking donations from alumni of the program for specific service projects being performed by current members.

AmeriCorps members may not:

- Raise funds for living allowances or for an organization's general (as opposed to project) operating expenses or endowment;
- Write a grant application to the Corporation or to any other Federal agency.

## **Ineligible Service Categories, Activities and Uses of Grant Funds**

There are specific activities which members and grant funded staff may not participate in while on duty, or perceived to be on duty. There are specific types of organizations whose mission may fit the eligibility criteria but are expressly prohibited from receiving AmeriCorps funding under federal law. This section is intended to provide a general outline, for full descriptions of the topics discussed in this section refer directly to AmeriCorps legislation.

### **Prohibited Activities** [http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/acprohibited\\_activities.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/acprohibited_activities.pdf)

While charging time to the AmeriCorps program, accumulating service or training hours, or otherwise performing activities supported by the AmeriCorps program or the Corporation, staff and members may not engage in the following activities (see 45 CFR § 2520.65):

- a. Attempting to influence legislation;
- b. Organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes;
- c. Assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing;
- d. Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements;
- e. Engaging in partisan political activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office;
- f. Participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials;
- g. Engaging in religious instruction, conducting worship services, providing instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship, constructing or operating facilities devoted to religious instruction or worship, maintaining facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship, or engaging in any form of religious proselytization;
- h. Providing a direct benefit to—
  - a. A business organized for profit;
  - b. A labor union;
  - c. A partisan political organization;
  - d. A nonprofit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 except that nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent participants from engaging in advocacy activities undertaken at their own initiative; and
  - e. An organization engaged in the religious activities described in paragraph (g) of this section, unless Corporation assistance is not used to support those religious activities;
- i. Conducting a voter registration drive or using Corporation funds to conduct a voter registration drive;
- j. Providing abortion services or referrals for receipt of such services; and
- k. Such other activities as the Corporation may prohibit.

AmeriCorps members may not engage in the above activities directly or indirectly by recruiting, training, or managing others for the primary purpose of engaging in one of the activities listed above. Individuals may exercise their rights as private citizens and may participate in the activities listed above on their initiative, on non-AmeriCorps time, and using non-Corporation funds. Individuals should not wear the AmeriCorps logo while doing so.



## **Nonduplication and Nondisplacement (42 U.S.C. 12584a)**

- **Nonduplication**— Assistance provided under National Service laws shall be used only for a program that does not duplicate, and is in addition to, an activity otherwise available in the locality of such program.
- **Nondisplacement**—An employer shall not displace an employee, position, or volunteer (other than a participant under the National Service laws), including partial displacement such as reduction in hours, wages, or employment benefits, as a result of the use by such employer of a participant in a program receiving assistance under National Service laws.
- **Private Nonprofit**—Assistance made available under National Service laws shall not be provided to a private nonprofit entity to conduct activities that are the same or substantially equivalent to activities provided by a State or local government agency that such entity resides unless nondisplacement requirements are met.

## **Other Requirements**

### **Insurance Coverage**

Subgrantee organizations must provide OCS proof of general liability and motor vehicle insurance, both with policy limit amounts meeting the requirements outlined in the contract. Members engaged in both on- and off-site project activities must be covered. Agencies should review current policies to ensure they cover non-employees in special statuses, such as AmeriCorps members.

- Generally insurance costs are an allowable expense and may be charged to the grant as an administrative cost on a pro-rated basis, or included in program match. If insurance is included in the approved budget, insurance purchased specifically for the AmeriCorps program may be charged as a direct program cost.

### **Disability Inclusion**

All AmeriCorps programs are urged to reach out to recruit members with diverse backgrounds who are qualified to contribute their unique set of perceptions, skills, and life experiences to the program and the community served. Programs and activities must be accessible to people with disabilities, and programs must provide reasonable accommodation to the known mental or physical disabilities of otherwise qualified members, service recipients, applicants, and program staff.

- In all cases, member selection must be based on the applicant's qualifications and if they can perform the essential service activities, with or without reasonable accommodation.
- All selections and project assignments must be made without regard to the need to provide reasonable accommodation. Programs are not asked to enroll individuals who are unqualified or who pose a direct threat to the health or safety of others that cannot be eliminated through reasonable accommodation, nor is a program required to make accommodations that are unduly burdensome or that will alter the program design fundamentally. However, all such determinations must be documented.

Once an individual discloses a disability and requests an accommodation, evaluate the organizations capacity to provide the accommodation. The first step is to talk to the person – find out what functional limitations exist and what essential functions need to be accomplished, or what barrier exists to participation in the program or activity. In many cases individuals will know what they need and how to secure it. In other cases, individuals will not be certain what they need. There are several resources available to assist both you and the individual in evaluating appropriate and effective accommodations.

When an individual discloses a disability and requests an accommodation that involves getting or modifying equipment, or involves structural changes, it is recommended that programs utilize technical assistance resources. These resources are knowledgeable of effective, efficient accommodations. Often they can identify accommodations that are both cost effective practical than persons who are not experts in accommodation can identify.

- CNCS's National Service Inclusion Project [www.serviceandinclusion.org](http://www.serviceandinclusion.org)
- ServeMontana [http://serve.mt.gov/?page\\_id=2961](http://serve.mt.gov/?page_id=2961)
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is resource that is available at no cost. JAN can be reached at 800.526.7234 (voice/TTY). <http://askjan.org/>
- Independent Living Centers (ILCs) are federally funded, located across the country and can provide you with assistance. <http://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory-results/MT>

### **Providing Accommodations: Financial and Administrative Burden**

Under the Rehabilitation Act and the terms of the grant and agreement with OCS/CNCS, your organization must provide accommodation upon request by a qualified individual with disabilities, unless doing so is an undue financial or administrative burden to the program. This is a very high standard. In some cases, your program may receive requests for accommodations that are unduly disruptive to the program or are expensive. Being difficult to achieve, time-consuming, or costly, do not meet this standard. There are many factors that go into evaluating the obligation to provide accommodations.

**Undue administrative burden** means the accommodation will alter the fundamental nature of your program. For example, adjustment of hours is often a form of reasonable accommodation. However, you must carefully consider the circumstances and the legal requirements when adjusting hours for participants. AmeriCorps State and National programs have statutory requirements regarding service hours, and changes to hours that violate these requirements alter the fundamental nature of the program. Therefore, these changes are not required for reasonable accommodation and providing them may violate the Corporation's statute.

First determine if your program has consistently applied these requirements to all participants. Strict adherence to the legal requirements to deny a person an accommodation for his or her disability when flexibility is allowed for others is discrimination because of disability.

If consistently applied, the following scenarios would alter the fundamental nature of the program:

1. A full-time AmeriCorps State/National/NCCC member who is not required to serve 1700 (or a higher minimum established by the program);
2. An AmeriCorps VISTA who is not available for service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in the same manner as other AmeriCorps VISTAs at that site or within that state; and
3. An AmeriCorps member who extends the time within which to complete the requisite number of hours. NOTE: There are ways to work around a fundamental alteration in the 12 month completion requirement. If a person with a disability needs time off for extensive medical treatments, hospitalization, etc. or is unable to serve full time for a period, options are:
  - Place on a non-disciplinary suspension for the period, with that time added to the end of the current service period. This allows the person to complete the full term of service and obtain the Education Award. It makes no difference if this puts their completion date after the end of the grant cycle. However, the participant cannot receive a living allowance during this period.
  - There may be circumstances under which they can be converted to part-time status. This is dependent on program design and may affect the individual's member benefits.
  - They can be released for compelling personal circumstances. This allows them to receive a prorated Education Award.

**Undue financial burden** considers many factors, including:

The overall size of the entire organization (not just the National Service program) – number of employees and participants; number and type of facilities; and size of budget.

1. The organizations design, including the composition and structure of your entire organization's work force and service force.
2. The nature and cost of the accommodation needed.

*In all cases, if you fail to provide a reasonable accommodation when requested by a qualified individual with disabilities and claim undue burden, the onus is on you to fully justify the undue burden claim.*

In some cases, there are funds available from the State Commission to assist you in paying for accommodations by reimbursement. If available, funds may not be used to assist in meeting basic accessibility and accommodation requirements, but they can be used to make the program more accessible than the minimum requirements mandate to provide reasonable accommodation. Therefore, if providing an accommodation would be an undue financial burden for your organization, these funds may be available on a case by case basis.

**OCS Inclusion & Accommodation Assessment**, <http://serve.mt.gov/for-program-directors/>

Each Spring OCS issues the AmeriCorps Inclusion & Accommodation Assessment. The Assessment is an anonymous survey, and the goal is to have all active members respond. The results of the Assessment are compiled and are presented to the Commission, and are then posted online.

### **AmeriCorps Progress Reports (APR)**

Each AmeriCorps subgrantee is required to submit AmeriCorps Progress Reports. Late or inaccurate reports are considered indication of poor performance and may impact future funding recommendations. Progress reports monitor performance measures, assess program strengths and challenges, and highlight unique program/member achievements as well as other reporting required by the CNCS/OCS.

Operating programs submit progress reports biannually and planning grants submit reports quarterly.

- Progress report templates and more, <http://serve.mt.gov/for-program-directors/>

At a minimum, programs must ensure that: All questions are answered; program impact is clearly stated; challenges are clearly outlined; and measures to address challenges, improve the program, and/or comply with federal laws and regulations are clearly identified.

# Chapter Three

## *Affiliation, Recruitment, and Benefits*

### **AmeriCorps Affiliation**

AmeriCorps Terms & Conditions dictate that “the grantee must identify the program as an AmeriCorps program and members eligible for an Education Award as AmeriCorps members.” This does not mean that “AmeriCorps” must be in the name of the program, but the program must identify itself as being associated with AmeriCorps.

Further, “[t]o establish the relationship between the program and AmeriCorps, the grantee should use the phrase ‘The AmeriCorps National Service Network’ or ‘an AmeriCorps program’ or ‘a proud member of the AmeriCorps National Service network’”.

- Donors to subgrantee programs may not use the AmeriCorps name or logo in advertising or promotional materials without the written permission of the Corporation. Permission may be withheld if recognition of the donor is inconsistent with the Corporation’s policies and objectives.

### **Ethic of Service**

The centerpiece of the AmeriCorps ethic is summed up in the motto “Getting Things Done”. The dual mission is to strengthen communities and develop members’ leadership ethic & civic responsibility. To create an *esprit de corps* for members, programs are encouraged to plan on the basis of “classes or cohorts” of members who begin and “complete/end service” at or near the same time.

Orientation sessions for staff, site supervisors and members should include a discussion on the national scope of AmeriCorps and an explanation of how the program fits in to the AmeriCorps network and the Montana State Service Plan. Appropriate opening ceremonies, including issuing the AmeriCorps Pledge, are important for all members. Programs should arrange for members to participate in cross-stream activities such as the ServeSymposium, National Days of Service, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and other development opportunities sponsored by State Commissions or by the Corporation.

### **CNCS Branding and Messaging Guide**

AmeriCorps grantees are required to use approved AmeriCorps branding and messaging language. CNCS and OCS have firm expectations that all programs, staff and members will comply with the CNCS Branding and Messaging Guidance as it pertains to logos, terminology and more. Recipients of AmeriCorps resources are strongly encouraged to place signs that include the AmeriCorps name and logo at their service sites and may use the slogan “AmeriCorps Serving Here.” AmeriCorps participants must state they are AmeriCorps members during public speaking opportunities.

CNCS periodically issues Branding and Messaging Guidance. Failure to comply may result in disallowed costs. <http://www.nationalservice.gov/documents/ameriCorps/2016/ameriCorps-branding-and-messaging-guidance>

**Logos** are available for use from CNCS: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/outreach-resources/logos>

In order to maintain uniform AmeriCorps identity, obtain written permission from CNCS is required prior to,

- Using the AmeriCorps name or logo on materials that will be sold;
- Using the AmeriCorps name or logo on clothing *not* worn by members or alumni;
- Altering the AmeriCorps logo or use it as a part of any other logo or design; or
- Allowing a donor to use the AmeriCorps name or logo in promotional material.

### **Service Gear and Other Promotional**

For a program to identify themselves with AmeriCorps (except Education Award only Programs (EAP)) each, “must use the AmeriCorps name and logo on service gear and public materials such as stationery, application forms, recruitment brochures, on-line position posting or other recruitment strategies, orientation materials, member curriculum, signs, banners, press releases and publications related to their AmeriCorps members”.

- Approved AmeriCorps gear: <http://www.nationalservicegear.org/>
- Complimentary publications & promotional items: <https://pubs.nationalservice.gov/Default.aspx>

In addition to the many publications available from CNCS (handbooks, manuals, recruitment and marketing materials), local programs often develop their own materials. To let others know of your affiliation with AmeriCorps, it is expected that programs use the AmeriCorps name and logo in publications. Publications that are distributed externally must include the following acknowledgment and disclaimer:

*“This material is based upon work supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service under AmeriCorps Grant No. \_\_\_\_\_. Opinions or points of view expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of AmeriCorps or the Corporation for National and Community Service.”*

Except for safety equipment, grantees may only charge the cost of member service gear to the federal share if it includes the AmeriCorps logo. All safety gear may be charged to the federal share, regardless of whether it includes the AmeriCorps logo. Grantees may add the AmeriCorps logo to the program specific gear including a uniform using federal funds. All other service gear must be purchased with nonfederal funds.

In addition to AmeriCorps service gear, there are other ways that the common look and affiliation may be achieved. Some of these items are allowable to the grant.

- Members should identify themselves as AmeriCorps members and describe AmeriCorps appropriately.
- Signs should identify sites as AmeriCorps project service sites/service locations/host sites.
- Program staff should be able to discuss AmeriCorps with visitors and interested others.
- Stationery, brochures, fax cover sheets, and newsletters can identify the program as AmeriCorps, including the use of the logo.

- Your members and the community should know that they are AmeriCorps members serving, not workers or volunteers.
- Press releases and other public materials should acknowledge that the program is part of the AmeriCorps National Service network.

## **AmeriCorps Recruitment**

This section is intended to provide basic strategies that can be adapted to recruit members, and information on how you can successfully tap into the national pool of applicants.

- More information, <http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/recruitment>

Whether your program's recruitment strategy is local or national, be encouraged to target your recruitment to as diverse an audience as possible and appropriate. Diversity is important in recruitment, and can be represented in many ways: age, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, education background, race and ethnicity, skills, physical abilities and others.

First, take some time to plan the program's recruitment strategy, which should include position descriptions for members and site supervisors, a list of target groups that may be well suited for the positions and ways to make sure that the target groups are aware of your organization and the positions available.

### **Developing a Recruiting Message**

Once you develop a list of target groups, think of different ways you can market or "sell" your AmeriCorps message to each group. Remember, vary your approach because not all people will respond to the same message. Below are some basic "selling" points:

- connect with others to make a difference
- gain job skills and career networks
- travel/meet new people/adventure
- appeal of AmeriCorps and service
- give back to your community
- defer qualified student loans
- education award to pay off student loans and/or for post-secondary education
- opportunity to apply education and experience to help communities

Target your materials What would attract an applicant to your program? Ask current members what attracted them! Applicants want to know what they'll be doing and what they'll gain from service as an AmeriCorps member. Target your approach to specific audiences. For example, if your project focuses on education, advertise to education majors the valuable classroom experience that they'll gain as AmeriCorps members. Ask your current members to comment on your existing materials and give you either formal or informal reactions. Even though you don't need to incorporate all of their comments you are likely to receive some helpful feedback.

**Make it personal.** Personal contact makes the difference. Use your alumni (or current members on non-service hours) to attend a state fair, conference, or school career day to share their experiences. Consider holding an information session with the contacts that you've made. Invite your current members, service alumni, and other members in the area to share their experiences and give potential applicants a firsthand account of your program.

**Respond quickly and follow up.** Keep a record of people you've sent applications to or who have requested further information. Follow up with them with a postcard, phone call, or e-mail to invite them to take the next step. Offer suggestions to them on completing the application. Often people applying to service with AmeriCorps apply to multiple programs so it is important to maintain contact. If the applicant is better suited for another program in Montana, please refer them to that program's staff.

**Collaborate and ask for help.** There may be other programs recruiting in your area - check with them and find out how you can combine mailings, or share space at events with other programs. They may even have a list of people they were unable to place who could be perfect for your program. Contact other National Service programs in your area, including National Senior Corps and AmeriCorps VISTA.

**Create a Network.** People often decide to do something because someone they respect or trust has suggested it. Ask local high school counselors, college placement officers, and community leaders to promote AmeriCorps and your program. Again, consider your target audiences and the attraction that the program holds for them.

#### **Order materials**

- AmeriCorps Materials Request Form recruitment materials  
[http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ac\\_materials\\_request.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ac_materials_request.pdf)
- Publications library <https://pubs.nationalservice.gov/>

#### **Application Forms and more,** <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/current-members/forms>

To the extent possible, all applicants should use the My AmeriCorps system to apply to service opportunities. More on My AmeriCorps in the next section and on the CNCS website.

- If an applicant cannot use the My AmeriCorps system then a paper form may be acceptable and is required for program staff to complete the enrollment.
- If you have your own application, you are asked to also to accept the AmeriCorps application from potential candidates who have enrolled on-line using the My AmeriCorps website.
- If requested, programs must make their forms available in alternative formats for individuals with disabilities.

#### **National Recruitment Website** <https://my.americorps.gov/mp/login.do>

*My AmeriCorps* is the web-based system for the recruitment and placement of AmeriCorps members. The system allows individuals to learn about AmeriCorps throughout the country, to search for programs based on selected criteria, and to apply online. Program staff initiate a member service listing to list each



of the program opportunities, receive applications and select applicants. Programs may receive and approve applications online.

Inversely, the system allows programs to search for individuals based on the same selection criteria and to contact individuals via e-mail. When using My AmeriCorps as a program staff, the system serves to assist in reaching a national pool of potential applicants and send them information.

*My AmeriCorps* is intended to generate interest in serving in AmeriCorps, to simplify the application process, and to increase customer service to program staff and to potential applicants. A procedure is in place for applicants without internet access to become users by means of contract staff available via the toll-free number 800.942.2677.

To access the system for recruitment, an authorized program staff accesses eGrants. The member management system side of eGrants is referred to as 'the Portal' and you can access the recruitment system through <https://egrants.cns.gov/espan/main/login.jsp>.

- Programs submit member recruitment listings for each service location to CNCS for posting on My AmeriCorps. If the listings are compliant, they will be approved and posted. If the listings are not compliant, CNCS will return it to the OCS Grants Manager with the requested changes. The OCS Grants Manager will then send an email requesting that you make the changes and resubmit for CNCS approval.
- CNCS guidance on posting member listings  
<http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/ameriCorps/member-assignment-listings>.
- New to AmeriCorps? Create an eGrants account to post opportunities, search for potential applicants, contact applicants, review applications and select members.

## **Member Orientation**

The grantee must conduct an orientation for members designed to enhance member security and sensitivity to the community. Orientation should cover member rights and responsibilities, including the code of conduct, Prohibited Activities (including those specified in the regulations), requirements under the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 1988 (41 U.S.C. 701 *et seq.*), suspension and termination from service, grievance procedures, sexual harassment, non-discrimination issues, and program specific topics that ensure success. Orientation sessions for staff, site supervisors, and members should include a discussion on the national scope of AmeriCorps, and explanation of how your local program fits into the Montana and nationwide AmeriCorps network of National Service programs.

### Core topics for member orientation should include, at a minimum

- National Service: the big picture and the dual mission of AmeriCorps.
- An overview of the history and nationwide importance of National Service including
  - ✓ The history of service in America
  - ✓ A discussion of the AmeriCorps ethic
  - ✓ The meaning of community
  - ✓ The doors of opportunity that will open through service

- ✓ The responsibilities that individuals have to themselves, their families, the community, and the nation.
- Background information about the community or natural environment where the service will occur.
- Program rules, regulations, and benefits (provide member program manual)
  - ✓ Drug Free Workplace Act of 1988
  - ✓ Sexual harassment and other discrimination issues
  - ✓ Grievance procedure
  - ✓ Making up missed service hours
  - ✓ Prohibited Activities
  - ✓ Release: personal compelling, or for cause
  - ✓ Rules of conduct
  - ✓ Safety protocol
  - ✓ Suspension & Reinstatement
- Program operating policies
  - ✓ Benefits
  - ✓ Living allowance
  - ✓ Program objectives & how to collect data for performance measure and/or evaluation
  - ✓ Staff and member roles
  - ✓ Timesheets
  - ✓ Travel and expense reimbursement policies

### **AmeriCorps Pledge**

During pre-service orientation, at the completion of pre-service training, or at another appropriate time, members should be asked to take the AmeriCorps pledge. Typically the Pledge is issued to members by program staff, a staff of OCS, a Commissioner, or an elected official, such as the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, a Tribal official or a local government official, such as a mayor. Members being inducted should stand, raise their right hand and repeat line by line, after the official.

*I will get things done for America—to make our people safer, smarter, and healthier.*

*I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities.*

*Faced with apathy, I will take action.*

*Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground.*

*Faced with adversity, I will persevere.*

*I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond.*

*I am an AmeriCorps member, and I will get things done.*

## **Member Development**

Remember, as a whole a program may allocate no more than 20 percent of the aggregate required service hours to education and training. *It is an important note that this rule applies to programs as a whole, not to individual members. It is wise for each program to have a written policy on earning hours per category.*

Programs are required to provide members with the training, skills, and knowledge they need to succeed while in service.

### Examples of training for assigned service activities:

- skills training (such as mentoring, tutoring, trail maintenance and construction, etc.)
- recruiting, training, and retaining community volunteers
- cross-cultural sensitivity
- team building
- program and site specific training

### Examples of training to develop members:

- citizenship training
- communication
- accommodation of persons with disabilities
- conflict resolution
- CPR/first aid
- reflection activities
- Life After AmeriCorps ex. Using Ed Award, describing service on your résumé and more!

## **National Days of Service**

Several times throughout the year, AmeriCorps members are asked lead and participate in National Days of Service. This provides the opportunity to serve alongside community volunteers, other AmeriCorps members and members of other streams of National Service.

National Service days and other events include:

- Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service (January)
- AmeriCorps Week (March) \*attendance at the ServeMontana Symposium is expected\*
- Global Youth Service Day (April)
- 9/11 Day of Service and Remembrance (September)

## **AmeriCorps Member Benefits**

The CNCS megasearch is a helpful document to locate information,

[http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/ASN\\_Megasearch\\_Document\\_7-25-16.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/ASN_Megasearch_Document_7-25-16.pdf)

### **Living Allowance**

The National and Community Service Act of 1990, as amended, and the Serve America Act, requires AmeriCorps programs to provide full-time members with a living allowance. Each year the Corporation sets the minimum and maximum amount for member living allowance. It is important to always specify that the living allowance is not a wage as AmeriCorps members are not employees. In regard to the treatment of the member living allowance as income for purposes of determining eligibility for federal benefits programs, the Corporation will continue to work with other federal agencies, states and local entities so that they treat the living allowance appropriately for determining eligibility for other assistance categories.

### **Outside Employment**

While outside employment is NOT a member benefit, it is allowable, and is in this section as the living allowance rate may influence an AmeriCorps member's inclination to seek outside employment. ServeMontana's policy is that while outside employment is allowable, it must be at a location other than the AmeriCorps service site, or any other project related organization to which the AmeriCorps member serves, and must not interfere with successful completion of the individual's AmeriCorps Term of Service.

Before accepting outside employment, the AmeriCorps member is expected to speak with and obtain approval of their supervisor and program staff to do so. It is a best practice that this approval be written. This is to ensure that there is no conflict between their AmeriCorps service and the outside employment.

While in service, the AmeriCorps member may only accept outside employment for positions that are:

- Part time
- Do not conflict at all with the AmeriCorps service activities, or hours.
- Do not conflict with any AmeriCorps program requirements or policies, such as prohibited activities.
- Is in compliance with all federal, state and local laws and regulations.

Remember there are likely tax implications to increased income from outside employment, and other impacts to pay attention to, such as impacts on public benefits, income taxes, cost of income determined health benefit coverage, and potentially others, as per each individual's personal situation.

While outside employment is best addressed with the member, the service site and the program, ServeMontana reserves the right to determine if an AmeriCorps member's outside employment is adversely impacting member's service commitment.

## **Health Care**

Health care benefits must be made available to all full-time members and meet the standards established by the grant terms and conditions for the particular grant year. Health care benefits may be provided to members serving less than full time, but Corporation funds may not be used to support the cost. An exception is made for less than full time members who are performing service on a normal full time schedule for a period of six weeks or more. These members are eligible for health care benefits and CNCS funds may be used. Dependent coverage is not an allowable grant expense.

[https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/page/AmeriCorps Health Care FAQs 5 12 2014.pdf](https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/page/AmeriCorps%20Health%20Care%20FAQs%205%2012%202014.pdf)

## **Child Care**

Eligible members may receive subsidized child care through Gap Solutions while participating in National Service. For more information on childcare benefits, eligibility, application documents and FAQ visit

<https://www.americorpschildcare.com/Default.aspx> or call 855.886.0687

### Eligibility requirements for AmeriCorps Child care benefits include:

- ★ Must be an active member serving on a normal full-time schedule for at least six weeks.
- ★ Member must need child care services in order to participate in AmeriCorps.
- ★ Member's household income must not exceed the maximum amount under the Child Care & Development Fund (CCDF) Block Grant rules established by the state or territory in which the child care services are provided.
- ★ The member must be a custodial parent or legal guardian of a child under the age of 13.
- ★ The child must be living with the member.
- ★ Once the member is approved and accepts the AmeriCorps child care benefit, the member must not receive a child care benefit for the same child from any other source.

### Members not eligible for child care benefits

Programs may choose to provide child care benefits to less than full-time members from non-CNCS sources of funds. Less than full-time members may be eligible for child care subsidies available through state-administered child care assistance programs. Various state child care programs are also available to families who are on TANF, "at risk" of going on TANF, or losing TANF due to the AmeriCorps living allowance.

## **Service Site hiring AmeriCorps members**

AmeriCorps programs in Montana work hard to recruit, select, and engage citizens into service with eligible organizations across our state. It is expected that each program has a policy that strongly discourages service site organizations from hiring AmeriCorps members until after the term of service is completed.

- If a site is known to hire AmeriCorps members before the term of service is completed they risk being ineligible for hosting an AmeriCorps member, or receiving AmeriCorps service in the future.
- While ServeMontana encourages all organizations to sign on as an Employer of National Service, the expectation is that the active Term of Service will be honored.

## Eli Segal Education Award

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps/alumni/segal-ameriCorps-education-award>

The Serve America Act links the value of AmeriCorps Education Awards to the maximum value of the Pell Grant and as such, may change on a yearly basis. The value of the Education Award for a particular grant year can be found in the RFP associated with that year and is based on the below terms on service.

Education Awards amounts are determined by the grant year that the applicant was awarded. This may be different than the amount advertised on the Corporation for National & Community Service website.

<i>Term</i>	<i>Hours completed</i>
Full-time	at least 1700
Half-time	at least 900
Reduced half-time	at least 675
Quarter time	at least 450
Minimum time	at least 300

## Requirements for Earning and Education Award (42 C.F.R. 2526.15)

The eligibility of a member to receive an Education Award is based upon an end of term evaluation that must be completed by a direct supervisor of that member. The end of term evaluation must assess three basic points, which should also be spelled out in the member service agreement and position description. Has the member:

- Completed the required number of service hours for the term of service?
- Satisfactorily performed on assignments, tasks, or projects, and
- Met performance criteria as determined by the program and communicated to the member?

The responsibility for determining and certifying members' eligibility for an Education Award is the programs, and as such organizations should have contained in their grievance procedures language pertaining to a member who exits without an Education Award.

## Forbearance

Individuals serving in an approved AmeriCorps or Silver Scholar position may be eligible to postpone the repayment of their qualified student loans through an action called loan forbearance. While a loan is in forbearance it continues to accrue interest however, at successful completion of a term of service the National Service Trust will pay all or a portion of the interest accrued on the loan. Requests for forbearance can be made on-line through [My AmeriCorps](#).

- <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameriCorps/segal-ameriCorps-education-award/using-your-segal-education-award/postponing>
- If there are unforeseen delays with My AmeriCorps, members may request to use a paper Forbearance Request Form, available online  
[http://www.americorps.gov/for\\_organizations/tta/forms.asp](http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/tta/forms.asp)

### **Education Award Usage (42 U.S.C. 12604)**

After a member has completed the term of service and the exit has been certified by the program, the Education Award will become available for disbursement through the My AmeriCorps Portal. Not all schools and loan providers are eligible to receive AmeriCorps Education Award payments. For further description of eligible institutions see 42 U.S.C. 12604, or contact the National Service Trust. Members have seven years from the end of service date to use their award.

In general, the Education Award may be used

- to repay qualified student loans;
- to pay all or part of the cost of attendance or other educational expenses at a qualified institution of higher education;
- to pay expenses incurred in participating in an approved school-to-work program;
- to pay expenses incurred in enrolling in an educational institution or training establishment that is approved under 38 U.S.C chapter 36 or other applicable provisions of law, for offering programs of education, apprenticeship, or on-job training for which educational assistance may be provided by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; and
- to pay interest expenses in accordance with regulations.

After completing service, members are considered Alumni/Alums. Alums may choose to split the Ed Award to pay a combination of any of the above educational expenses. The payment will be made directly to the school or loan holder designated by the individual.

### **Allowable Education Expenses 42 U.S.C. § 12604(c)**

*Current educational expenses include:*

- "Cost of Attendance" for a degree- or certificate-granting program of study at a qualified school.
- Educational expenses for non-degree courses offered by qualified schools, such as continuing education courses.

The Education Award can be used at Title IV institutions of higher education (including graduate and professional programs), at the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS), and at qualified vocational schools. An institution is considered a Title IV school if it has an agreement with the U.S. Department of Education making its students eligible for at least one of the federally backed forms of financial assistance (*such as Pell Grants, Perkins Loans, Stafford Loans, National Direct Loans, and Federal Consolidated Loans*).

The Education Award can also be used at a program of education approved by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Beginning with terms of service that started on or after October 1, 2009, the Education Award may be used to pay expenses incurred in enrolling in an educational institution or training establishment that is approved under the GI Bill.

To make sure the institution qualified, check with the financial aid office or the National Service Trust.

## Education Award Matching

For a list of Montana Campus Compact member institutions that match the Education Award

- <http://www.mtcompact.org/awards-scholarships/segal-ameri-corps-education-awards/>

For a nationwide list of institutions that match the Education Award

- <https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/segal-ameri-corps-education-award/matching-institutions>

## Qualified Loans

National Service legislation defines *qualified student loan* as a loan backed by the federal government under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (except PLUS Loans to parents of students), or under Titles VII or VIII of the Public Health Service Act. Education Awards may be used to repay a student loan made by a state agency, including state institutions of higher education. AmeriCorps Education Awards may not be used to repay any other type of loan, even if the loan was obtained for educational purposes. The Education Award may be used to repay defaulted student loans as long as the loans meet the definition of *qualified student loan*.

For questions about if a loan meets the definition, contact the National Service Trust 888.507.5962

## Interest Payments

Individuals who have successfully completed a term of service in AmeriCorps or Silver Scholars are eligible to have the Trust pay as much as 100% of the interest that accrued on their qualified student loan during their service. The portion that the Trust will pay is determined by the type of service (full or part-time) and the length of service period.

The Trust will not pay interest if the member failed to complete their term of service unless there is a compelling personal circumstance and the member earned a pro-rated award. An interest payment will only be made after service is successful completion of service and the individual has been provided the Ed Award.

## Education Awards and Taxes

Interest payments, and all payments made with the Education Award, are considered by the IRS to be taxable income in the year in which the payment(s) are made. When and how much of the Ed Award is redeemed will likely impact the individual's overall income tax liability. The Trust DOES NOT deduct taxes from Education Awards or interest payments. If the Education Award and interest payments total more than \$599.00 in a calendar year, in January of the following year, the Corporation will issue a Form 1099 to be used in income tax return preparation. The total sum of interest payments and the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award payments are listed together on the 1099 form.

*Since the Ed Award is taxable, it is not a scholarship and should not be referred to as one.*

<http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/alumni/segal-ameri-corps-education-award/tax-implications-education-award>



However, members may be eligible for other tax relief through the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997.

For more information check the following resources:

- IRS <https://www.irs.gov/uac/about-publication-970> : IRS public contact = 800.829.1040.
  - To request IRS Publication 970, Tax Benefits for Higher Education, call (800.TAX.FORM (800.829.3676) or by download it from the IRS website

### **Transferring an Education Award**

Legislation was passed in 2009 to allow eligible AmeriCorps members aged 55 years and older to transfer certain Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards that they have earned to their eligible children or grandchildren. Learn more here <http://www.nationalservice.gov/node/29894>

# Chapter Four

## *Member Management*

### **Member Records**

For each member entered into an AmeriCorps position there are a number of records that must be retained by the program. In some instances these records may be stored electronically, but as many require signatures, a file must be kept for each member. If your program intends to keep any member records in an electronic format the system must meet all requirements of Sections 1703 and 1705 of the Government Paperwork Elimination Act and the contract with the Governor's Office of Community Service.

For each member, records must be kept of the member's application, documentation of eligibility, service agreement, time sheets, performance evaluations, entrance and exit forms (depending on programs internal policies), and documentation of all pertinent National Service Criminal History Checks (NSCHC). These items will be discussed further in the remainder of this chapter.

Some required documentation can or should be stored separately from the member file. Common documentation that may be stored separately is documentation of childcare eligibility, tax forms, and criminal history check results.

- It is important to note that in alignment with [HIPAA](#), *any member medical documentation received by the program should be stored separately from the member file*. All medical information should be stored in a separate, secure location and only available to the personnel for whom it is necessary.

Supervisors and program directors should conduct periodic internal reviews of member files to ensure that service hours are being accurately tracked and that member files are current, complete, and compliant.

### **Member Eligibility (45 C.F.R. 2522.20)**

Effective February 27, 2012, AmeriCorps programs are not required to retain documentation to verify identity and citizenship of selected applicants, however the documents must be reviewed. Identity and citizenship status of potential AmeriCorps members is automatically verified by the Social Security Administration (SSA) when the individual is enrolled in the program. Typically, verification is completed within three days and the member's status in the Portal will be indicated as 'verified'.

- In the instance that a member's identity cannot be verified by the SSA, CNCS will contact the program director and the individual who enrolled the member giving instructions on what steps are needed to complete the enrollment.

## **High School Diploma and Self-Certification**

To be eligible for AmeriCorps service, an individual must have received a high school diploma or its equivalent, or,

- Did not drop out of secondary school to enroll as an AmeriCorps participant and must agree to obtain a high school diploma or its equivalent prior to using the Education Award; or
- Obtain a waiver from the Corporation based on an independent evaluation secured by the program demonstrating that the individual is not capable of obtaining a high school diploma or its equivalent; or
- Be enrolled in an institution of higher education on an ability to benefit basis and be considered eligible for funds under section 484 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1091);

For tutoring programs (42 U.S.C 12572)

- The applicant must have obtained a high school diploma
  - Unless the tutoring services are through a structured, school managed cross-grade tutoring program

If the completed member enrollment form with a signed self-certification regarding educational level is maintained in the member file, the file does not need to include a copy of the high school diploma or equivalent.

For members who did not achieve a high school diploma or equivalent, programs must provide support services to help them get a high school diploma or equivalent certificate. Members must have their high school diploma or equivalent, or obtain a waiver, to access the Education Award. For programs that include the attainment of high school equivalency as a purpose of their program and include GED classes during the program year the attainment of a high school degree or equivalent may be a requirement of successful completion of the term of service.

## **Terms of Service**

A term of service must be stated in a member service agreement. There are two definitions which must be followed with regard to the term of service,

1. Full time term of service is defined as 1,700 hours of service over a period of not more than one year
2. A half time term of service is defined as 900 hours of service during a period of not more than one year.

There are no specific guidelines on the amount of time which a member must be allowed to complete a less than halftime term, however regulations state that a program must “ensure that each member has sufficient opportunity to complete the required number of hours for the Education Award”. AmeriCorps grant terms and conditions further state that “[in] planning for the member’s term of service, the [sub] recipient must account for holidays and other time off, and must provide each member with sufficient opportunity to make up missed hours.”

An exception to all Term of Service rules is allowed if a member is serving in an approved National Service Position directly related to disaster response. In this case the member may extend their term of service for up to 90 days. During this extended service period the program is permitted to continue offering that member with a living allowance and other benefits however, the value of the member's Education Award will not change.

### **Member Start and End dates**

Member start and end dates must fall within the start and end dates of the subcontract issued by OCS which will most always be a 12 month period. Members, whether receiving a living allowance or not, cannot continue to serve beyond the end date of the contract unless some unforeseen and special circumstance arises where the contract must be extended to allow members to complete their service hours.

Extending a grant beyond the contracted end date is referred to as a "no-cost extension" and must be requested from OCS at least 30 days before the end of the contract. No-cost extensions are reserved for situations where a member(s) needs additional time to complete their term of service. Extending a contract requires OCS approval, may result in adjusting required reporting dates and will likely create additional reporting requirements for the program.

### **Number of Education Awards**

As per CNCS, under no circumstances will an individual be eligible to receive more than the equivalent of two full time Education Awards.

### **Serving Multiple Terms**

The Edward M. Kennedy [Serve America Act Final Rule](#) (published August 20, 2010) increased the limit of terms one may serve in AmeriCorps State and National from two to four terms with added limits stating no individual may receive more than the aggregate value of two full-time Education Awards regardless of the stream of service through which the member earns the Award.

The following guidance is provided by CNCS: Although the *amount* of a fulltime award may change, the *value* of a fulltime award will always be equal to 1.

- For example, an individual who completed a half-time position approved in 2009 received an education award of \$2,362.50. The value of this award is the amount received, \$2,362.50, divided by \$4,725, the amount of a full-time award in the year the position was approved, or .5.
  - Another individual completes a half-time position approved in 2010 and receives an Ed Award of \$2,675. The value of this award is the amount received, \$2,675, divided by \$5,350, the amount of a full-time award in the year the position was approved, or .5.

Using this calculation, the value of an award received for half-time service will always be equal to .5. If an individual leaves a term of service for compelling personal circumstances and receives a pro-rated award, the value attributed to that award will be based on the amount actually received.

- For example, an individual was released for compelling personal circumstances from a full-time position approved in 2009 after serving 800 hours, and received a pro-rated award of \$2,223.52. The value of this award is the amount of the award received, \$2,223.52, divided by, \$4,725, the amount of a full-time award in the year the position was approved, or .47.
- Another individual was released for compelling personal circumstances from a full-time position approved in 2010 after serving 800 hours, and received a pro-rated award of \$2,517.64. The value of this award is the amount of the award received, \$2,517.64, divided by \$5,350, the amount of a full-time award in the year the position was approved, or .47.

Exhaustion of the number of terms one may serve in AmeriCorps State and National would not necessarily prevent an individual from enrolling in a position in another National Service program, such as AmeriCorps NCCC, AmeriCorps VISTA, or Silver Scholars.

<b><i>AmeriCorps National Service Network</i></b>	<b><i>Maximum Number of Terms within each type of AmeriCorps Program</i></b>
AmeriCorps*State & National	4
AmeriCorps*NCCC	2
AmeriCorps*VISTA	3

*For further guidance, please contact the Governor's Office of Community Service Grants Manager.*

### **Team Leaders**

The National and Community Service Act, as amended, provides for approved National Service positions to include a "position involving service as a crew leader in a youth corps program or a similar position supporting a National Service program that receives an approved National Service position" 42 U.S.C § 12573(6). This language allows programs, in addition to youth corps, to use AmeriCorps members to provide an additional layer of leadership and support for members under certain conditions.

All Prohibited Activities apply to AmeriCorps Team Leaders just as they do to all AmeriCorps members.

Team Leaders are not permitted to act in a staff capacity or to supervise AmeriCorps members. Team Leaders must not be responsible for program development and coordination. They may assist by providing information and resources on best practices or by helping to develop portions of the program such as training curriculum. Under no circumstances should an AmeriCorps member serving as a Team Leader be the individual legally responsible for the program or other AmeriCorps members. A Team Leader position description should predominantly include activities that involve performing direct service and providing support to members engaged in direct service.

While Team Leaders are not to serve as the program's administrative staff, they may be engaged on a limited basis, in activities that support the administration of the AmeriCorps program. These include:

- raising funds or in-kind contributions in direct support of specific AmeriCorps projects, such as service projects. See 45 CFR 2520.40 for detail regarding members and fundraising; and
- participating in recruitment activities for new members.

Examples of *allowable* Team Leader activities:

- working alongside members performing direct service, to serve as a model and to provide on the spot assistance;
- training members, providing guidance and support to members, including reflection exercises, conflict resolution, advice for transitioning out of AmeriCorps, etc.
- leading monthly/weekly meetings of members;
- working with the community to develop partnerships, including community volunteers, that will support the members' projects; and
- communicating with program staff, site supervisors, and other members to ensure the execution of a quality program that is consistent with the AmeriCorps provisions.

Examples of *unallowable* Team Leader activities:

- signing member timesheets;
- accessing another members file;
- managing the program's payroll and budget
- evaluating member performance;
- disciplining AmeriCorps members;
- grant writing to CNCS
- enrolling/dismissing AmeriCorps members;

**National Service Criminal History Checks (NSCHC) (42 U.S.C. 12645g) 'On Time, Every Time'**

With the passage of the Serve America Act of 2009, it is a requirement that all grant covered individuals, AmeriCorps members, program staff and all others, funded either by match or federal funds, must submit to requirements that define and comply with National Service Criminal History Checks (NSCHC). NSCHC is not a background check; it is a series of steps that must be taken before a selected candidate's start date. NSCHC should be referred to as such, not as a background check.

CNCS has issued a requirement that all grantees complete a NSCHC eCourse annually. OCS requires that two staff from each program pass the course and stay current by submitting certificates of completion to the OCS Grants Manager.

- <http://cncstraining.articulate-online.com/ContentRegistration.aspx?DocumentID=62d3d556-45cf-4911-9cd1-aa7682e08aea&Cust=42402&ReturnUrl=/p/4240214797>

CNCS has a high priority on National Service Criminal History Check compliance and sets the expectation that checks will be 'On Time, Every Time'. To ensure that the timing and elements of the law are followed, program staff should refer to CNCS resources to stay current on compliance requirements.

- <https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/criminal-history-check>
- <https://www.nationalservice.gov/CHCVideoLibrary>
- Enforcement Guide: <https://www.nationalservice.gov/CHCEnforcement>

**NSCHC Montana Best Practice:** ServeMontana strongly recommends that all programs to rerun the NSOPW annually for staff and to retain each years of search results.

## Member Management

It is expected that members will be supervised while on duty and that the site supervisor is available and responsive to the member, the program, and OCS.

### eGrants Member Portal

Most member and grant management tasks are completed through the eGrants Portal which also serves as the repository for applications coming through the My AmeriCorps website. eGrants questions and error messages should first be directed to the eGrants helpline and secondarily to OCS.

- Member time records are not a function of the AmeriCorps portal. All AmeriCorps State grantees must establish a member time management system outside of the Portal that tracks the hour categories and that is used consistently.
- Help Desk Information: [https://questions.nationalservice.gov/app/ask\\_eg](https://questions.nationalservice.gov/app/ask_eg) or 800.942.2677.

### Member Service Agreements [AmeriCorps Grant Terms & Conditions](#)

The Member Service Agreement is the document that outlines member responsibilities, terms, conditions and benefits as an AmeriCorps member in a specific program.

The minimum required components of a Member Service Agreement are clearly stated in the Terms & Conditions of the specific grant that your organization has been awarded.

At a minimum the Member Service Agreement must contain the following:

#### Member position description

- ✓ Each member must have a position description for the service activities including performance criteria. It is the responsibility of the grantee to ensure that member positions “do not include or put the AmeriCorps member in a situation in which the member is at risk for engaging in any prohibited activity (45 CFR § 2520.65).” Resources to aid in creating a member position description: [http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/create\\_a\\_position\\_description.php](http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/create_a_position_description.php)

#### Member term of service

- ✓ Each agreement must state the number of hours the member must serve to complete their term of service and the time span over which that member has to complete their service hours.

#### The amount of the Education Award

- ✓ The amount of the Ed Award the member will receive for successful completion of service.

#### Standards of Conduct

- ✓ Describe how the member is expected to behave under the specific circumstances of their service; this may include dress code and appropriate use of language.

Prohibited Activities, 45 CFR 2520: ex. lobbying, political, religious, and advocacy activities...and more.

Non-duplication and Nondisplacement: 45 CFR § 2540.100(e)-(f)

Fundraising, 45 CFR § 2520.40-.45

Drug Free Workplace Act of 1988

- ✓ Programs receiving federal funds must comply with the Drug Free Workplace Act and publish a Drug Free Workplace statement.

Civil rights requirements, complaint procedures, and rights of beneficiaries

Suspension and Termination Rules

Release for Cause

- ✓ Specific circumstances under which a member may be released for cause: 45 CFR 2522.230

Grievance Procedures (45 CFR 2540.230)

- ✓ Including Grievance procedures in the Member Service Agreement ensures that the member receives the procedure and signs acknowledging the receipt and review of the document.

Other requirements by Grantee

- ✓ In the Member Service Agreement, grantees may include any additional requirements necessary for the member to complete their term of service and receive the Education Award. Examples of additional requirements of members may be required attendance of service events or a minimum of volunteers recruited.

### **Member Position Descriptions**

Each grantee of OCS/CNCS must accurately and completely describe the activities to be performed by each member in a position description. Member position descriptions are an important first step in successful member recruitment and in ensuring compliance with AmeriCorps prohibited activities.

- ✓ Each grantee of OCS must develop member positions that provide for meaningful service activities and performance criteria that are appropriate to the skill level of members.

The recipient is responsible for ensuring that the positions do not include or put the AmeriCorps member in a situation in which they may be at risk for engaging in any prohibited activity, or being perceived as engaging in any prohibited activity, (see 45 CFR § 2520.65), activity that would violate the non-duplication and non-displacement requirements (see 45 CFR § 2540.100), or exceeding the limitations on allowable fundraising activity (see 45 CFR §§ 2520.40-.45).

- ✓ The recipient must accurately and completely describe the activities to be performed by each member in a position description.
- ✓ Position descriptions must be provided to CNCS and OCS upon request.



- ✓ The recipient must ensure that each member has sufficient opportunity to complete the required number of hours to qualify for an education award.
- ✓ In planning for the member's term of service, the recipient must account for holidays and other time off, and must provide each member with sufficient opportunity to make up missed hours.

Also remember that certain terms and phrases, even though accurate in describing a member's service, may construe an unallowable activity.

- For example, the word advocate is defined as: *one that defends or maintains a cause or proposal*. However, the word is often taken to mean: *to conduct activities aimed at influencing public officials*. The definition of the word is thus not a strictly unallowable AmeriCorps activity the interpretation of the word however is strictly unallowable.

CNCS sets the standard and resources on member position descriptions can be found online website

- <https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/recruitment/encorps/create-position-description>

### **Guidelines for Fundraising by Members (45 CFR 2520.44)**

AmeriCorps members may not assist their organizations with major fundraising efforts or in writing grant applications to the Corporation. *However, CNCS policy permits some limited activities related to fundraising by AmeriCorps members, when such activities directly support the service of the program.*

*For example, members may:*

- Seek donations of books from companies and individuals for a program in which volunteers teach children to read
- Write a grant proposal to a foundation to secure resources to support the training of community volunteers
- Secure supplies and equipment from the community to enable volunteers to help build houses for low-income individuals
- Secure financial resources from the community to assist in launching or expanding a program that provides social services to the members of the community and is delivered, in whole or in part, through the members of a community-based organization
- Seek donations from alumni of the program for specific service projects being performed by current members

*Members may not:*

- Raise funds for living allowances or for an organization's general operating expenses or endowment (as opposed to project)
- Write a grant application to the Corporation or to any other Federal agency

Member hours earned fundraising must be tracked on the time logs in a separate category and may not exceed 10% of the originally agreed-upon term of service, as reflected in the member enrollment in the National Service Trust (45 CFR 2520.45).

## **Evaluating Member Performance (45 CFR 2522.220)**

The grantee must conduct and keep a record of at least a midterm and an end-of-term written evaluation of each member's performance for Full- Time members, and an end-of-term written evaluation for less than Half-time members. The end-of-term evaluation should address, at a minimum, the following factors:

- The number of hours the member has completed and whether this satisfies their term of service;
- Whether the participant has satisfactorily completed assignments, tasks, or projects, making them eligible for the Ed Award; and
- Whether the participant has met other performance criteria that were clearly communicated both orally and in writing at the beginning of the term of service.

Under AmeriCorps regulations end of term evaluations are the key piece in determining a member's eligibility for additional terms of service. For this reason all members, regardless of the status of their exit, must receive an end of term evaluation.

- Applicants must disclose previous terms of service when applying for an AmeriCorps position, so the program can contact the applicants former service program staff to request a reference and information on previous member evaluations.

## **Member Safety**

Under grant provisions, programs must have appropriate safeguards in place to ensure the safety of AmeriCorps participants and community volunteers. Members may not participate in projects or undertake service activities that pose a significant safety risk. Programs should establish appropriate policies related to the supervision of members and provide specific training to minimize risks to members. While AmeriCorps members are not considered employees, they are eligible for worker's compensation, and workers comp is an allowable grant expense.

- <http://erd.dli.mt.gov/work-comp-regulations>

## **Voting**

Programs should encourage all eligible members to vote and when appropriate allow members time during to vote during scheduled service hours.

## **Member Release from Participation, 45 C.F.R. § 2522.230**

A program may release members from participation for two reasons: (a) for compelling personal circumstances; and (b) for cause. See 45 CFR § 2522.230 for applicable requirements and 2 CFR § 200.333 for record retention requirements of this documentation.

In addition to the regulations, the following applies: *No Automatic Disqualification if Released for Cause:*

- A release for cause covers all circumstances in which a member does not successfully complete the term of service for reasons other than compelling personal circumstances. Therefore, it is possible for a member to receive a satisfactory performance review and be released for cause.
  - For example, a member who is released for cause from a first term—e.g. the individual has decided to take a job offer but who otherwise performed well, would not be disqualified

from enrolling for a subsequent term as long as the individual received a satisfactory performance evaluation for the first period of service.

- In the exit form, there is a yes or no required response as to if the member satisfactorily completed the requirements of service. If 'no' is indicated, the member will be disqualified for future terms of service.

#### Member Release for Compelling Personal Circumstance

This circumstance allows a member to end their term of service early while still receiving a prorated Education Award. There are two qualifications: (1) the member must have completed at least 30% of the term and (2) they must demonstrate a compelling personal circumstance.

- It is the duty of the member to demonstrate the compelling personal circumstance and the AmeriCorps program to determine whether or not the member's reason for leaving is legitimately a compelling personal circumstance. For additional guidance on whether a release for compelling personal circumstance is warranted the program should contact the Governor's Office of Community Service.
- Members exited without an Education Award, and those exited with partial Education Awards are typically selected for review during OCS/CNCS compliance monitoring.

Compelling personal circumstances are beyond the participant's control, such as, but not limited to:

- A participant's disability or serious illness;
- Disability, serious illness, or death of a participant's family member if this makes completing a term unreasonably difficult or impossible; or
- Conditions attributable to the program or otherwise unforeseeable and beyond the participant's control, such as a natural disaster, a strike, relocation of a spouse, or the nonrenewal or premature closing of a project or program, that make completing a term unreasonably difficult or impossible.

Other circumstances the Corporation, has for public policy reasons, determined as such, including:

- Military service obligations
- Acceptance by a participant of an opportunity to make the transition from welfare to work
- Acceptance of an employment opportunity by a participant serving in a program that includes employment among its participants in its approved objectives.

Compelling personal circumstances do not include leaving a program:

- To enroll in school;
- To obtain employment, other than in moving from welfare to work or in leaving a program that includes in its approved objectives the promotion of employment among its participants; or
- Because of dissatisfaction with the program.

As an alternative to releasing a participant, after determining that compelling personal circumstances exist, the program may suspend the participant's term of service for up to a year (or longer if approved

by the CNCS based on extenuating circumstances) to allow the participant to complete service with the same or a similar AmeriCorps program at a later time. Approvals are awarded on a case-by-case basis. It is best practice for a program to receive or maintain documentation of a compelling personal circumstance (e.g. a statement from the member, doctor's note, etc.) but, it is necessary to document that the member was released for compelling personal circumstance (staff memo to file).

#### Member Release for Cause, 45 CFR 2522.230

A release for cause includes any circumstances other than compelling personal circumstances that warrant an individual's release. These circumstances may include anything from disciplinary removals pursuant to the program's service agreement with the member, to the member's exit prior to completing service hours.

In alignment with the Drug-free Workplace Act of 1988, AmeriCorps programs must release for cause any participant who is convicted of a felony or the sale or distribution of a controlled substance *during* a term of service. In either of these instances the program must notify the Governor's Office of Community service within in 10 days upon the member's release.

What are the consequences of releasing a member for cause?

- The member will not receive any portion of the Education Award or any other payment from the National Service Trust, including loan forbearance.
- An individual who is released for cause must disclose this fact in any subsequent applications to participate in AmeriCorps. Failure to do so disqualifies the individual for another Ed Award.

Regardless of the situation under which a member is released it is required that they be exited in the eGrants system within 30 days and that, if they are receiving childcare benefits, the provider be notified immediately.

#### **Replacing a Member, Slot Refill**

With the exception of recipients whose grant awards have special award conditions under 2 CFR §§ 200.207 or 200.338, AmeriCorps State programs that have fully enrolled the awarded member positions *are allowed to replace any member who terminates service before completing 30 percent of the term provided that the member who is terminated is not eligible for and does not receive a pro-rated Education Award. This is known as a 'slot refill'.*

- A slot that is being refilled does not necessarily need to be replaced with the same slot type. If the program is 100% enrolled there is the option to convert the slot, but the resulting Education Award from the refill must be equivalent to that which was originally awarded. That is, a full time slot may be replaced with a full time slot, two half time slots, or three (3) quarter time slots.

#### **Changes in Member Service Year Member positions, Slot Conversions**

As of November 13, 2006, programs are allowed to convert one full-time position to up to three quarter-time positions. In the years since, CNCS now allows State Commissions to approve slot conversions from

the approved budget to a configuration that maximizes utilization of the awarded MSY, under certain circumstances. This policy allows AmeriCorps slots to be converted in accordance with the grant award, therein on increasing the number of slots in the program, within the awarded MSY. Thus, when converting a slot to one requiring fewer hours, the grantee is not limited to a one-for-one slot conversion, and may increase the number of members correspondingly. *However, the total number of MSYs and Education Award amounts in the grant may not increase as a result of the slot conversion.*

All conversion requests must be Trust neutral, (within the total Education Award amounts allocated to the grant), are subject to availability of funds in the Trust, and awarded MSY. Slot conversions may not leave .21 or greater MSY unused. Remainder of MSY that is the result of slot conversion may not be available later in the program year.

- Information on converting a filled slot,  
[https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/FAQs\\_4\\_10\\_14.pdf](https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/FAQs_4_10_14.pdf)

The OCS slot conversion request procedure is as follows:

- Program staff complete the slot conversion request template available on the AmeriCorps, For Program Director's page and submit the completed request to the OCS Grants Manager, ideally a week prior to the needed change.
- Grants Manager will review and approve or may review and request more information, such as a budget modification or assurance.
- If not approved, no change.
- If approved, the Grants Manager will communicate approval for the program staff to proceed with making the approved change in the program's slot table by making the changes, validating then saving in eGrants.
- If another slot conversion is requested, the program should use the most recent slot configuration to propose the next change, not the original slot configuration.
- Unauthorized changes in eGrants may result in compliance findings or unintended loss of MSY, please follow the process.

Remember! The total number of MSYs and Education Award amounts in the grant *may not increase* as a result of the slot conversion.

### **Member Exit**

To officially end AmeriCorps service, if a member has successfully completed the term of service or not, members should complete the exit process in My AmeriCorps Portal.

- In the case that a member does not exit themselves and cannot be reached, the program should complete a National Trust Exit form and indicate that the individual was not available to sign the form and add the documentation into the member file.
- The final step of the process is for the program to exit the member from eGrants within 30 days of the member's final hour served. Failure to comply with 30 day rule may negatively impact program performance and future funding recommendations.

## Site Visits

AmeriCorps programs are expected to visit their service locations at least annually, perhaps more often, by design or to address unforeseen circumstances. AmeriCorps programs should document the visit and use a written methodology to uniformly conduct the visits, such as a site visit questionnaire. Program budgets should facilitate staff travel to accomplish the site visits.

AmeriCorps programs should expect onsite compliance monitoring visits from the Office of Community Service, and possibly CNCS. All visits will be coordinated with program staff. Grant monitoring is based on annual risk assessment determination and is not an audit. Site visits allow OCS/CNCS staff to learn more about service and training activities, community partnerships, ensure compliance with Corporation regulations, policies and grant provisions, progress of a program toward meeting Performance Measures, to highlight best practices, and to provide technical assistance.

- OCS Risk Assessment and monitoring tools <http://serve.mt.gov/for-program-directors/>

# Chapter Five

## *Fiscal Management*

It is expected that organizations operating an AmeriCorps grant have instituted tools necessary to ensure that all federal funds are properly allocated, documented, and accounted. Programs should adhere to best accounting practices whenever possible given the capacity of the organization. The financial management of a program is monitored in three ways: monthly Periodic Expense Reports, quarterly Federal Financial Reports, and through fiscal monitoring.

### **Setting up Financial Systems**

The Notice of Grant Award and the Terms & Conditions contain many specific details for governing and managing the grant. The organization's financial officer and accountant should be familiar with the more detailed financial and management requirements contained in Corporation regulations, the grant provisions and the applicable Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular, 2CFR200.

### **The Basics of a Responsible Financial Management System**

To build a solid financial management system, programs must use generally accepted accounting practices with general ledgers and similar books of record, supported by source documentation that establishes a clear audit trail. The financial reports must clearly lead back to the ledgers and source documents.

Individual time distribution records (time sheets) must be kept for all grant covered individuals, regardless of their status as exempt or non-exempt. Records must identify the individual source of funds to which time is being charged. This is especially important for staff who are partially funded under the grant and whose other duties would be unallowable under AmeriCorps funding, such as lobbying or fundraising activities.

As a best practice, grantees should segregate office financial duties to the extent possible. This could include but is not limited to: having one person sign the checks and another reconcile the bank statement, and ensuring that employees are not allowed to sign their own paychecks. The checklist below will help your organization organize and fulfill the fiscal compliance expectations.

### **Checklist for Setting up Financial Systems**

- ✓ Set up AmeriCorps Account The AmeriCorps account must be a separate account in the organization ledger or have a separate account number. All federal grant awards must be tracked separately, including CNCS. The federal share and the match must be tracked separately.
- ✓ eGrants to access eGrants, an organization's authorized employees must create an account. This will automatically generate an e-mail for the eGrants administrator within the organization. When the administrator receives the e-mail they may approve or deny the employees access and assign them an appropriate access level.

- ✓ Tracking In-Kind Match The program is responsible for tracking in-kind services from partners and from their own agency. This includes donated items and staff time. It is recommended that the program implement an in-kind donation tracking sheet to document each individual donation that will be counted as match. This document should allow for the donor to estimate the value of the donated good or service as well as a place for listing the actual amount claimed as match.
- ✓ Tracking Cash Match A system must be developed to track the organization's cash match. OCS and CNCS expect each program to meet the budgeted match. Cash match is held to the same allow-ability and documentation as federal funds awarded under the grant.
- ✓ Disbursement of Member Living Allowance  
Members must receive the living allowance in equal installments over the term of service. The stipend is not dependent on the number of hours served in any service period.
  - For members completing hours prior the completion of the term of service, they may be exited with an award, but may only receive a stipend for the period during which they were actively serving.
  - If a member serves no hours during a period they will still receive a living allowance. However it is recommended that if a member goes 30 days without completing any service hours the member be suspended or released. Remember time sheets are required to be current within 30 days.

## **Match Requirements**

### Cost Matching Requirements for AmeriCorps Programs, line item budget

Each subrecipient is responsible for meeting matching amounts in the grant award and approved budget. This amount based in your organization's proposal may exceed the minimum match required.

### Valid documentation of match includes:

- Donations, letters/statements of costs that show the type of donation, value and frequency
- Time and effort forms or others that show contribution of time to program by staff
- In kind receipt/voucher forms

### Acceptable Sources of In-Kind Contributions – Examples:

- Professional Services
- Meetings held in donated space
- Public service announcements
- Recognition events

As a general rule, it is not allowable to use federal funds as match for a CNCS grant.

- However, the exception is if, "independent authority for a grantee to use other federal funds in connection with a National Service program" is documented by the other federal source, then other sources of federal funds may be used as match. If your organization seeks independent authority, please check in with OCS staff to determine proper documentation.



## OMB Circulars

The OMB circulars cited in the Notice of Grant Award and Terms & Conditions address many details and specifics governing the management of a federal grant, including allowable expenses. It is important to note that the Circulars alone do not cover all allowable grant expenses. For example, volunteer time generated by an organization may be counted as match under some federal grants, but follows stricter guidelines under AmeriCorps regulation. If you have any questions, contact the OCS financial staff.

- Be sure to stay current on the grant's Terms & Conditions AND Pay attention to 2CFR200

## Helpful Tips to Avoid Disallowance

If an organization does not comply with the grant provisions and OMB requirements, costs that have been charged to the grant can be questioned and ultimately, disallowed. If a program's financial management system is seriously inadequate, OCS or the Corporation may opt to withhold reimbursement payments, suspend funds for a duration, terminate the grant, recover funds, or take other legal action.

Avoid common problems by ensuring that

- accounting practices are adequate
- internal controls are strong yet practical
- policies and procedures for documentation and record-keeping exist and are being followed
- financial status reports are accurate
- all matching contributions, particularly in-kind are documented correctly

## **Allowable Costs *In general, a cost is allowable if it meets the following criteria:***

- It is reasonable and necessary for the performance of the grant award.
- It conforms to the limitations and exclusions in the award as to types or amounts of cost items.
- It is consistent with the policies and procedures of the grantee organization.
- It is documented adequately.

## Taxes

Most programs are required to pay FICA. Under federal law, the FICA payment rate is 15.3 percent of the living allowance. Half (7.65 percent) is paid by the program and half is deducted from the member's living allowance. FICA payments cover Social Security and Medicare benefits.

- In Montana, AmeriCorps members are not eligible for unemployment insurance.

## Income Taxes

Under federal tax laws, ordinary income tax rules apply to member benefits. A living allowance is taxable as "compensation for services" and generally is subject to federal withholding. Room and board also may count as income subject to withholding, even though the members do not receive cash.

- Income eligible members may be able to claim an exemption from withholding if (1) they had no tax liability in the previous year, and (2) they expect to have no tax liability in the current year. State income tax withholding laws also apply.

Like all personal income taxes, taxes on the living allowance are the responsibility of the individual member. Members must complete a W4 form at the start of the term of service. At the end of the tax year, programs must provide each member with a W2 form.

## **Fundraising Rules for Staff**

Remember that in general, AmeriCorps members may not assist the organization with major fundraising efforts. However, Corporation policy permits some limited activities related to fundraising by grant covered staff, to the extent that such activities:

- provide immediate and direct support to a specific and direct service activity;
- fall within the program's approved direct service objectives;
- are not the primary activity of the program; and
- do not involve more than 10% of any individual member's time.

Under OMB Circulars it is not allowable to charge the grant for costs for "organized fundraising" or expenses incurred "solely to raise capital or obtain contributions" (*however it is allowable to apply an appropriate amount of indirect funds to these activities*).

### **Some examples of what your organization's program staff may do with federal grant funds,**

- Develop and print materials such as brochures and annual reports to be used for outreach to the general public, which includes potential board members, funders, and community partners.
- Contact individuals and organizations that are potential partners who may assist the program in delivering services.
- Ask the board of directors and other volunteers to raise funds on their own time.
- Pay for a program evaluation to demonstrate the program's impact and effectiveness.
- Solicit community involvement with or in-kind support for the program—e.g., seek volunteers to help with a project and donations of building supplies for a construction project.
- Coordinate community involvement in a day of service and other direct service activities that may have a fundraising element.
- Include members of the public (*including funders and other community partners*) on a general mailing list for newsletters or brochures and other general interest publications. (*Publications paid for from AmeriCorps grant funds, including matching or other federal funds, should not contain solicitations of donations*).
- Include in the general-purpose newsletter a "wish list" of needed in-kind items.
- Invite members of the public, including funders, to make a site visit to the program.
- Ask for advice from individuals with expertise who may be business or foundation staff regarding matters such as program development, training, and evaluation.
- Invite members of the public, including funders and other community partners, to attend graduation ceremonies and other special events.
- Ask a local business to sponsor a recognition event for members or volunteers.

**Program staff may not,**

- Use AmeriCorps grant funds, including matching or other federal funds, to develop promotional materials solely targeted at prospective funders.
- Use AmeriCorps grant funds, including matching or other federal funds, to engage in a direct mail campaign to raise funds.
- Use AmeriCorps grant funds, including matching or other federal funds, to conduct capital campaigns or endowment drives.
- Hire a development consultant and charge fees to your AmeriCorps grant.
- Charge time spent by staff on fundraising to sources of AmeriCorps or other federal grant funds.

## **Grant Modifications**

### **Changes in the Grant Not Involving the Budget**

Examples of program changes that require prior written approval of OCS and/or CNCS:

- changes in the scope or goals of the program;
- changes in member position types and locations;
- changes in the start and end dates of a grant;
- decisions to sub-grant or sub-contract AmeriCorps activities not previously approved;
- slot conversions, see section on slot conversions for information and process guidance.

### **Changes in the Grant Involving the Budget**

Changes to the grant budget should be requested through the budget modification form found in the Periodic Expense Report (PER) supplied to the program. Examples of program changes that require prior written approval of OCS and/or CNCS:

- Purchases of equipment over \$5,000 unless specified in the grant award budget.
- Transferring funds from one budget category to another.
- Moving budget from Member Support costs to Program Operating costs.

### **Retention of Grant Records 45 CFR § 2541.420**

In general, you must keep all records for a period of three years or more from the date of submission of the appropriate final financial status report for the period. If an audit is started prior to the expiration of the three-year period, the records must be retained until the audit findings involving the records have been resolved and final action taken. Double check the contract with OCS to see if it requires longer records retention; some contracts require up to 8 years of record retention.

**Formula and State Competitive Award Member Position Transfers.** State commissions are NOT allowed to transfer member positions among the state formula and competitive subrecipients within a given prime grant in order to maximize enrollment and cost effectiveness. State commissions may not transfer member positions between competitive and formula subrecipients, or vice-versa. State commissions may not transfer funds among competitive subrecipients.

- With restrictions a Commission, parent organization, or Corporation Program Officer may grant permission to transfer a member to another AmeriCorps State or AmeriCorps National program. It is required that a member provide a compelling personal circumstance to justify the transfer.
- As a general rule, members may not transfer across different streams of service (e.g. from AmeriCorps State or National to AmeriCorps VISTA).

### **Audit Requirements**

As per 2CFR 200.501, recipients of federal grant awards who spend \$750,000 or more in total federal awards are required to have audits performed in accordance with the organization type.

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/CFR-2014-title2-vol1/CFR-2014-title2-vol1-sec200-501>

### **The Role of CNCS Office of the Inspector General, aka OIG**

The Corporation's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is an independent office established to help improve the Corporation's programs and operations (including AmeriCorps). The OIG has the responsibility of keeping the Corporation's Chief Executive Officer and the Congress informed about problems and deficiencies relating to the Corporation's programs and operations nationwide. The OIG carries out this role by conducting and supervising audits and investigations that promote economy and efficiency, and prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse, in the Corporation programs and operations.

The OIG is authorized by statute to have full access to all records, reports, and other available material in conducting its work. The OIG also coordinates the Corporation's relationships on matters of fraud, waste and mismanagement with other organizations, including federal, state and local law enforcement agencies.

- For some very interesting reading, including cautionary tales, <https://www.cncsoig.gov/>

### **When to contact the Office of the Inspector General**

Programs should contact the Office of the Inspector General whenever someone in the organization discovers information indicating there may have been waste, fraud, or abuse, or any violation of criminal law at your program or program site. The OIG accepts confidential referrals of information.

Written notifications should be submitted to:

**Office of Inspector General**  
**Department of Health & Human Services**  
**ATTN: HOTLINE**  
**PO Box 23489**  
**Washington, DC 20026**

The OIG can also be reached by calling 1-800-HHS-TIPS (1-800-447-8477).

You may choose to contact OCS before, during or after you make a report but please consider informing us so that we may help you navigate the situation, if possible.

## **Closeout Process**

Grant Closeout is outlined in the AmeriCorps Terms & Conditions. It is important that all grant activity is concluded and that all members have completed service. Closeout forms are online under the Grant Closeout heading, <http://serve.mt.gov/for-program-directors/>. All close-out documents are due to OCS 45 days following the end of the grant period by 5:00 pm MST.

## **Financial Reporting**

On a monthly basis a Periodic Expense Report (PER) is due, the completed PER serves as a request for reimbursement. Quarterly, line item grant recipients must complete and submit a Federal Financial Report (FFR). The PER and FFR provide OCS information on program spending for desktop monitoring and serve as the request for CNCS funds. Both of these reports due dates are listed in the directions and due dates are typically communicated by OCS staff when sending the Report template. These reports are e-mailed to the organization's designated fiscal staff on a monthly basis.

A Federal Financial Report (FFR) must be submitted to the Commission each quarter by the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the month following the reporting period. If the due date falls on a weekend or holiday the report will be due on the next business day. FFR reporting forms are included in the monthly reporting workbook, also known as the Periodic Expense Report (PER).

- On a semi-annual basis programs are required to report any other sources of federal funds being used as match on the AmeriCorps grant.

# Chapter Six

## *Training and Technical Assistance*

ServeMontana is committed to providing quality assistance to AmeriCorps programs. It is our philosophy that the success of our AmeriCorps programs is our responsibility. In addition to coordinating training events, the Commission acts as a resource for programs to: 1) locate local, regional, and national training opportunities for both staff and members, 2) partner with other programs in the state to create a collaborative environment where best practices and challenges are commonly shared and, 3) provide assistance through scholarships for program staff to attend training events identified as pertinent to their development as an AmeriCorps subgrantee.

### **Needs Assessment**

The Commission currently utilizes needs assessment as a strategy to gather input to guide the State Service Plan, and to assess the training and technical assistance needs of AmeriCorps programs, the result of which is a dynamic, multifaceted approach that works with programs both collaboratively and individually to address the identified needs. The Commission is committed to working with organizations to provide training and technical assistance to strengthen programs to succeed as National Service grantees.

### **Training Evaluation**

Training and technical assistance activities conducted through the Commission is evaluated by participants. Information received is compiled and used when planning future training activities.

### **Training for AmeriCorps Program Staff, in state**

#### Program Director Conference Call & Annual Convening

Bimonthly conference calls are held on various topics based on the needs assessment of the programs. The program directors' training brings all National Service staff together for professional development and networking one time a year, typically in August in place of the call.

#### ServeMontana Symposium <http://serve.mt.gov/serve-symposium/>

OCS's signature event! This annual event brings all of Montana's National Service entities together and provides a forum to discuss sustainability as well as promote civic engagement.

- It is strongly recommended that each program plan and budget for at least one grant covered staff and as many AmeriCorps members as possible to attend this multiday event!

### **Training for AmeriCorps Program Staff, out of state**

*Please contact OCS to see if there are resources currently available to support attendance!*

- Leadership Forum for National Service Executives, Seattle, WA,  
<http://servewashington.wa.gov/programs/ameriCorps/subgrantee-resources/leadership-forum-national-service-executives>

- Points of Light Foundation's Conference on Volunteering and Service,  
<http://www.volunteeringandservice.org/?webSyncID=9631b809-b79b-7721-31dc-45e8b520bc8b&sessionGUID=707560d4-023e-b36a-19a4-3c4da6ac5ede>

### **CNCS Knowledge Network**

The National Service Knowledge Network an online Training and Technical Assistance website funded by the Corporation for National Service. CNCS's Knowledge Network contains online training tools, event calendars, effective practices, and more, <https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources>

# Chapter Seven

## *Additional Resources*

America's Service Commissions	<a href="http://www.statecommissions.org/">http://www.statecommissions.org/</a>
AmeriCorps Gear & Signage	<a href="http://www.nationalservicegear.org/">http://www.nationalservicegear.org/</a>
AmeriCorps Terms & Conditions	<a href="http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp">http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp</a>
AmeriCorps Legislation	<a href="http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp">http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp</a>
AmeriCorps Alumni	<a href="http://www.americorpsalums.org">www.americorpsalums.org</a>
CNCS Knowledge Network	<a href="http://www.nationalserviceresources.org">http://www.nationalserviceresources.org</a>
CNCS Managing AmeriCorps Grants	<a href="https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/managing-americorps-grants">https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/managing-americorps-grants</a>
CNCS National Service Criminal History Checks, aka NSCHC	<a href="https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/criminal-history-check">https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/criminal-history-check</a>
Education Award	<a href="https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps/alumni/segal-americorps-education-award">https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps/alumni/segal-americorps-education-award</a>
Ed Award Matching in MT	<a href="http://www.mtcompact.org/awards-scholarships/segal-americorps-education-awards">http://www.mtcompact.org/awards-scholarships/segal-americorps-education-awards</a>
CNCS Office of Inspector General	<a href="https://www.cncsoig.gov/">https://www.cncsoig.gov/</a>
Governor's Office of Indian Affairs:	<a href="https://tribalnations.mt.gov/">https://tribalnations.mt.gov/</a>
Recruitment Resources	<a href="https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/recruitment">https://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/recruitment</a>
Sample Forms & CNCS Forms	
○	<a href="https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps/current-members/forms">https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps/current-members/forms</a>
ServeMontana, for Program Directors	<a href="http://serve.mt.gov/for-program-directors/">http://serve.mt.gov/for-program-directors/</a>



## When to Contact OCS

Situation	Contact requirement	Point of contact
Appeal – funding decisions	Required	Executive Director
Budget transfer	Pre-approval required	Financial Manager
Changes in key grant staff	Required	Grants Manager
Changes to program scope	Pre-approval required	Grants Manager
Contract amendment	Required	Grants Manager
eGrants problem – application submission	Required - documentation	Grants Manager & eGrants Helpline
eGrants problems – general	Contact eGrants first	eGrants Helpline
Entering partnerships not included in original subgrant	Required	Grants Manager
Equipment purchase – unbudgeted	Required	Financial Manager
Grant closeout	Required	Financial Manager
Grant extension request	Required - 30 days in advance	Grants Manager
Grant funds <u>will not</u> be fully expended	If grant funds will potentially be left unspent contact OCS ASAP	Financial Manager
Grievance filing (service site/staff)	Recommended	Grants Manager
Grievance filing (member)	Required	Grants Manager
Late reporting – progress report	Required - extension request	Grants Manager
Late reporting –PER, RFR, FFR	Required - extension request	Financial Manager
Major audit findings	Required	Financial Manager
Member slots left unfilled	Required	Grants Manager
Member suspension	Required	Grants Manager
Member transfer – in	Optional	Grants Manager
Member serious injury or death	Required	Grants Manager
National Service Day - event	Required	Outreach & Grants Coord.
Pre award grant spending	Required – requires pre-approval	Financial Manager
Press/media events	Recommended	Outreach & Grants Coord
Press release/News coverage	Recommended	Outreach & Grants Coord.
Reasonable accommodation	Optional	Grants Manager
Member release– compelling personal circumstance	Optional	Grants Manager
Member release – for cause	Required - if involving a felony or is drug related	Grants Manager
Member replacement	Required - need approval	Grants Manager
Reporting/submission deadlines	Consult website first	serve.mt.gov
Service events	Recommended	Outreach & Grants Coord.
Slot conversion	Required - need approval	Grants Manager
Slots left unfilled	Contact OCS ASAP	Grants Manager

**\*End of Montana AmeriCorps Program Directors Guide\***